



Shifting organizational perceptions through visionary strategy creation



OVERVIEW

With the US-hosted 2026 World Cup approaching, Major League Soccer (MLS) was looking to keep up the impressive fan growth rate they had been recently experiencing. Thanks to a restructuring within their leadership, an opportunity opened up for Phase2 Technology to create and present next-gen ideas that focused on innovative experiences and fan growth.

As the project's Senior UX Designer, I brainstormed and mocked up innovative, disruptive, next-gen ideas to present to a new C-suite member in close collaboration with some Phase2 team members. I also directed and oversaw the research and creative portions of this project.

After two months of work, we presented four next-gen ideas (three of which were mine) to the new C-suite member. Because the work has yet to sell, I cannot reveal the ideas, so the remainder of this story will discuss my work at a high level.

MY ROLE

UX strategy / Strategic direction /
Research direction / Creative direction

TIMELINE

April-May 2023

MY CLOSEST COLLABORATORS

TEAM

Annie Stone - Director, Marketing Services
Frank Fabbraro - CTO
Matt Curtin - Director, Design
Mayeda Khan - Senior UX Designer
Gregg Shanefelt - Principal Engineer, Mobile
Michelle Tarr - Senior Director, Client Services
+11 more

TOOLS



This work is confidential so I cannot show visuals or discuss this any less vaguely than I already do here.

CONTEXT

Although MLS had been a client of Phase2 Technology for nearly 10 years, they had only used Phase2 as a development shop for their MLS App. Then in 2023, MLS' restructure caused the App product team to report to a recently hired SVP and C-suite member. This shift opened a significant opportunity for Phase2 to reintroduce itself and win a larger contract with more strategic and creative work.

KPIS & DESIRES

Growing the fanbase and engagement

Lean into immersive, innovative experiences

Bring big changes to the MLS App and how fans use it to interact with their clubs

Project vision

Deliver big picture, disruptive ideas and strategies that will lead to engagement and audience growth at MLS while changing their perception of Phase2 from developer to partner.

IMPACT

With four next-gen ideas in the net, MLS's perception of Phase2 shifted from a development shop to a strategic partner they could rely on, even if the work has yet to sell.

Internally, I proved to senior leadership I am a strategic leader, landing me on additional project teams for future opportunities.

WHAT THE RESEARCH TOLD US

I spearheaded research efforts through interviews and surveys. This included creating a discussion guide and sending another UX team member to a local MLS match to perform field research and interview fans for qualitative insights. In addition, I oversaw the creation of the remaining virtual interviews guides and surveys, allowing team members to conduct the research and bring back their insights.

Insights derived from the qualitative portion were combined with a variety of secondary research being discovered by the remaining team to give direction to our approach.



8 virtual interviews

125 survey responses

9 in-person, field interviews

KEY INSIGHTS

How people watch and engage with soccer is changing

In recent years, consumers have been looking for more digital interactions in their live entertainment. With 89% of fans watching matches on streaming services and Gen Z honing in on highlight reels, consumers want to experience the top moments from wherever they are.

Soccer is about the experience and comradery

It was immediately apparent in our field research that attending matches in-person is unlike most other professional sports. The air was filled with chants, singing, and energy—it's a level of investment and comradery that rivals the energy of Swifties.

Non-fans primarily haven't considered having an interest or don't know the rules

Among several reasons why people might not be soccer fans, it's primarily due to a lack of interest or knowledge around the sport. Without a spark, it can be difficult to move a non-fan to a casual fan.



STRATEGY IDEATION



Workshopping and collaboration

Utilizing broad "How might we..." questions, myself and 10 other team members created over 100 stickies full of disruptive ideas on a Miro board. These ideas were generated based on the C-suite member's desires, KPis, and our research insights. After consolidation, three of the final four next-gen ideas were founded in my contributions.

FROM DESIRE TO DIRECTION

Each of the final four next-gen ideas revolved around a set of strategies, which were:

- 1 Turn spectators into participants
- 2 Personalize the experience
- 3 Authentic approaches to advertising
- 4 Increase engagement within the MLS App

Changing perceptions of my skills

Afterwards, it became clear to Phase2's leadership that my skill set stretched far beyond a traditional UX role as I showcased how I excel at big picture—yet achievable—thinking. This perception shift gave me a new role on the project: a strategy partner to our Product Strategist.

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

Documenting final ideas to create alignment

During the idea refinement, there was a lack of clarity on the details of each next-gen idea among the team, especially those who weren't as close to the project. To provide guidance and create alignment, I took on the responsibility to write and elaborate upon each idea in a 14-page document. Each idea included:



- ✓ An overview of the idea
- ✓ Expanded details
- ✓ Benefits the idea would provide
- ✓ Related research

This effort also allowed others to contribute, make suggested adjustments, and ask questions to gain further insight.

Directing training asset creation

In order to create an engaging pitch deck that showcases Phase2's creative capabilities, it was necessary to attach visual representations to our next-gen ideas. Using my idea document and rough sketches, I instructed and guided the creative team to design high-fidelity Figma mockups. This effort included a video that intertwined our strategies, mockups, and recordings from the field research.

Overseeing additional leave-behind materials

Because the pitch deck was primarily visual, creating leave-behind decks became a requirement to both remind the C-suite member of our ideas and so they can pass it around within MLS. I oversaw the creation of the two leave-behind decks:

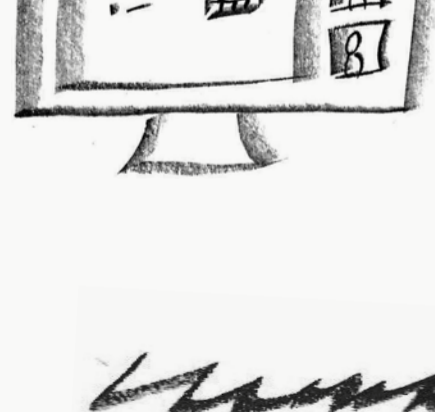
USER RESEARCH

Detailing our survey and interview insights.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Alternate version of the pitch deck with more detail written on the slides about each idea, taken from my idea document.

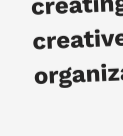
PRESENTING OUR "WORLD CUP" OF IDEAS



With the pitch deck and leave-behinds together, it was time to present our next-gen ideas. Although I didn't have a speaking role during the presentation, I was able to field questions from the C-suite member about the ideas, advertising, and other experience best practices.

At the end, the stakeholder remarked how well the ideas aligned with their vision and how this pitch changed their perception of Phase2 and our capabilities.

RETROSPECTIVE



I am deeply impressed with the leadership and initiative Justin Kalaskey is exhibiting on the MLS pitch. He is also "jumping in, thinking big, and creating" by fostering really great creative discussions across the organization.

VINCE TARDY, VP, CREATIVE PHASE2 TECHNOLOGY

Biggest challenge

Opening up my brain and translating these visual images of each next-gen idea in my head into words so that any team member could understand was arguably the toughest challenge. It was tough for me to succinctly describe not only each idea, but why it's important, what problem it's solving for who, and the expected impact it would make to its respective KPI.

What made this fun?

The most fun part was letting my imagination run wild and tapping into my knowledge of cutting-edge technologies to produce over-the-top ideas that might one day see the light of day.



FINAL THOUGHTS

Want to learn more about how I pulled off this hat trick? Header that "Contact" button.

LIKE WHAT YOU SEE? LET'S GET IN TOUCH

I'm always open to meeting new people. If you're in Baltimore/DC, let's grab a tea or beer. Not local? No problem, let's do it virtually!

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