How2 design an app to make fitness easier and more fun

What is an app?

An app is actually an application on a digital device that allows the user to do something. So there are apps that are games, others that provide information (such as maps, directions, news or locations of important places) and others that support users' hobbies and pastimes. You can learn to play chess on an app, learn about first aid techniques, or even how to read Chinese characters!

When you start to design an app, the best place to begin is with apps that are already out there. Think about all the apps you know, and how they work. See if you can answer the questions…

- What does the app do that makes a user want to use it?

- What does it look like that makes it attractive to the user?

- How does the user interact with the app? What do they have to do with the app for it to work? Is it easy to use the app? Is it important that the app is easy to use?

- It is easy to find your way around the app? Are there different places in the app you can go to and is it easy to get around? This is known as navigation and it's important to make sure your users can easily navigate around the app.

Tips for good app design

- Designers always start by getting to know their audience – who is going to use the app and what are the things they like and dislike. So is your audience going to be the same age as you, or younger or older? What sort of things to this age group like? It's probably easier to design your app for your own age group – you know lots about that age group because you're in it!!

- What is your app going to do? This is probably the most difficult thing to decide! You have to work out whether your app is going to reward users for exercising, monitor how much they do, or provide a distraction so that exercising is easier (just like Zombies, Run does!).

- When you have decided the main purpose of your app, think about the different pages (or screens) your app will have. Every app has a landing page, which is the first page that the users sees. From this, there are other pages that must be linked from the landing page. So there will be something that the user clicks on that takes them from the landing page to another page. This could be as simple as a 'start here' button or 'start exercising'.

- **A good way to plan out an app is with MS PowerPoint.** You could use a different PowerPoint slide for each app screen or page, and use each slide to explore what is going to be on the slide/page. You could include some images or graphics that you would like to use on each page too. Get some inspiration by looking at apps you like and what images/graphics appear on each page. Some of the best apps are full of images with very little text.

- On your first PowerPoint slide explain for yourself and your team (or even for your potential users) who the app is for and what it is going to do. Good designers always make sure they are absolutely clear about who is going to use their digital design, and what the design is meant to do.

- On each slide work out each screen of your app, and also work out how the user will move between screens. So on a slide say 'navigate to home' or to another screen. It's always important to have a

button that takes the user back to the home or landing screen so they can always find their way out of the app.

- Because PowerPoint is so versatile and easy to use, you can add all sorts of things to your slides to show what your app will look like and what will appear on each screen. So you can add images, text, even video if you felt that having some video in your app would work.

- And be creative and ambitious! So if you want to create an app that is like a game (Zombie, Run is almost a game) or even like Pokemon Go, where people are moving around trying to find Pokemon in the real world, then go for it!

- Just to remind you, Pokemon Go works by using the phone's GPS system (which locates it in a place), its camera and its clock to create a real world on the phone. Because the phone and the game knows where you are, it makes Pokemons appear in those places where they are most likely to be. So if you are near a stretch of water, such as a lake, you are likely to see Squirtles or Poliwags. Perhaps your app could be you chasing characters, or imitating their sporting activities making use of the camera on the phone!

- You can learn much more about app design and use software to create your app with AppShed. On the challenge page, at the bottom (underneath the Fitness Challenge section) you will find links to the AppShed course, which will teach you to use AppShed, and an AppShed project on TechFuture Classroom where you can do more with app design.