

User research & product strategy for Verbatim Books mobile app

PROJECT SUMMARY

User research & product strategy for an app that would encourage book lovers to visit a brick & mortar business. This was a class project.

TIMELINE & TEAM

3 weeks start to finish with me as the sole researcher & strategist.

RESPONSIBILITIES

- Surveys
- Competitive Analysis
- Product Strategy

RESULTS

It was determined that an app would not be the best way to increase foot traffic into the bookstore.





COMPANY OVERVIEW

Verbatim Books is an independent bookstore in the North Park neighborhood of San Diego, CA. Their mission is to get people offline and immerse themselves in the unfamiliar while experiencing the joy of discovering something new.

PROBLEM

Though reluctant to have a large online presence, Verbatim Books thought an app could help expand their reach to the local under-40 crowd and strengthen their link with the community.

They wanted to create a compelling mobile experience that encouraged their customers to visit the store (and read more!)

I completed qualitative user research and product strategy over a 3-week period.

WEEKS 1-2

RESEARCH & DISCOVERY

Did **competitive analysis** of book-related apps and websites.

Collected data from an **online survey** about book apps and buying habits.

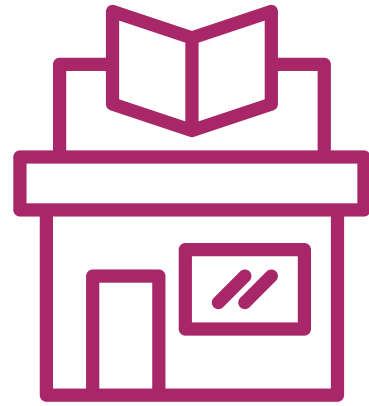
WEEK 3

PRODUCT STRATEGY

Considered how to get users to **visit the store more than use the app**, while ensuring the app was worth the download.

Concluded that an app would **not be the best use of the bookstore's resources.**

I did **competitive analysis** of 4 independent bookstore websites, 4 book-tracking apps/websites, and 4 book blogs to explore **common features and trends**.



INDEPENDENT BOOKSTORES

- No apps, only websites
- 100% had online purchasing
- 75% mentioned upcoming events
- 50% had recommendations



BOOK-TRACKING

- 100% had online purchasing
- 100% had bookshelves
- 75% had recommendations
- 75% let the user rate books
- 50% had book lists



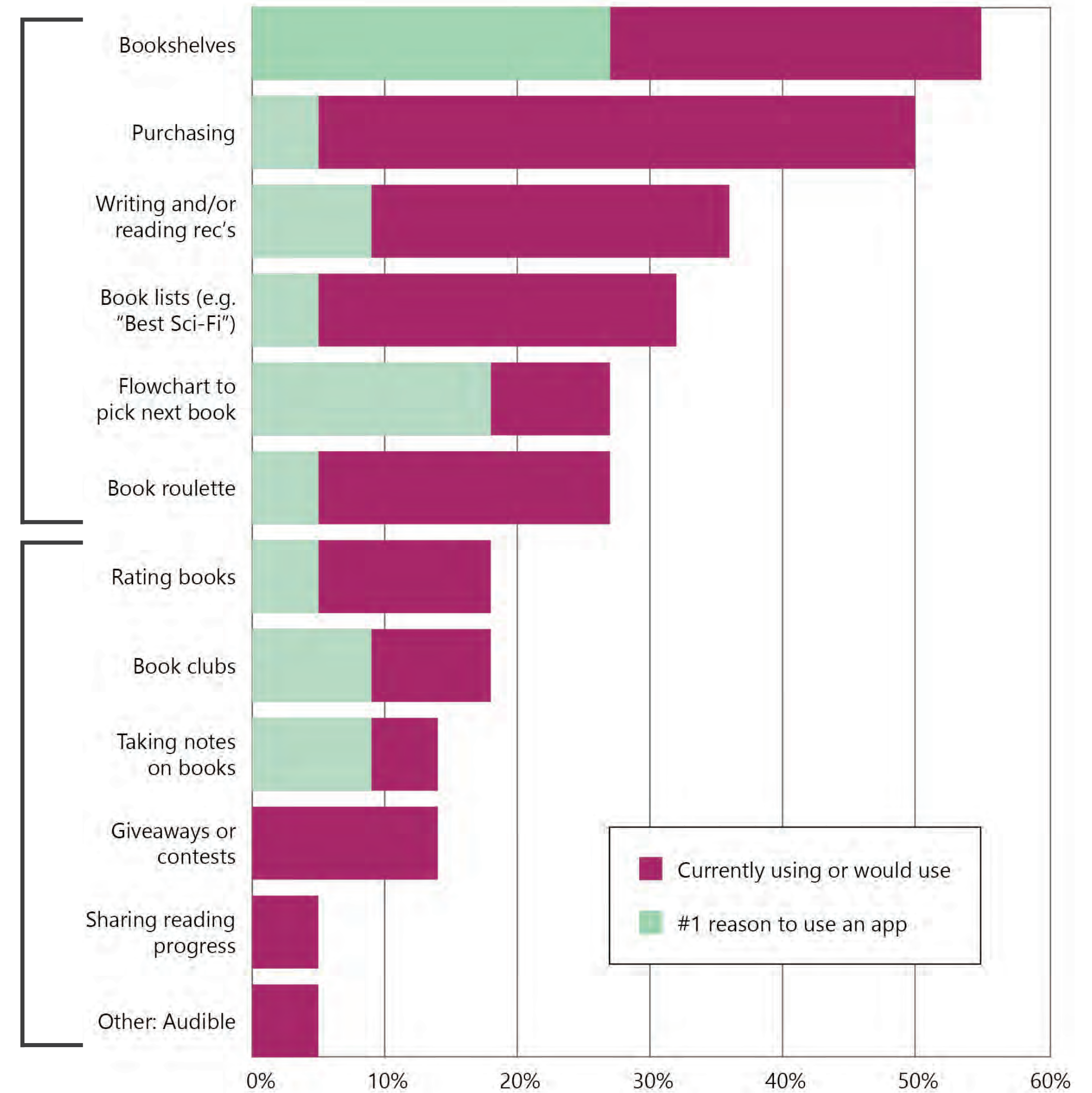
BOOK BLOGS

- 100% had recommendations
- 100% had books lists

Using an online survey, I asked **20 people** about their habits around **purchasing books and using book-related apps.**

The top 50% of features involved the user organizing, buying, or finding books.

These features include some of the common ones from my competitive analysis - book clubs, sharing progress, and rating books.



To align with the store's **ethos of getting offline and into the unfamiliar**, the app could not have features that would suck the user in. It needed to encourage users to read or visit the store, but still be **compelling enough to download**.

I split the common features I researched into two categories:

PERSONAL

- Bookshelves
- Purchasing
- Flowchart to pick next book
- Book roulette
- Rating books
- Taking notes on books

COMMUNITY

- Writing and/or reading rec's
- Book lists
- Book clubs
- Giveaways/contests
- Sharing reading progress
- In-store events

From here I considered:

① What personal features do **users like most?**

Bookshelves were the most popular feature.

② What would help the store **connect to the community?**

In-store events would draw people into the store, while **staff recommendations** would help readers get to know their booksellers.

③ What would make this app **stand out?**

Including mini-games, like a **flowchart or book roulette**, to find your next book could be a fun addition that would make the app worth the download.

PERSONAL

- **Bookshelves**
- Purchasing
- **Flowchart to pick next book**
- **Book roulette**
- Rating books
- Taking notes on books

COMMUNITY

- **Writing and/or reading rec's**
- Book lists
- Book clubs
- Giveaways/contests
- Sharing reading progress
- **In-store events**

From here I considered:

④ What should I **not include**?

Online purchasing was against the Verbatim Books mission.

Sharing reading progress or including user reviews could turn the app into an online community.

Rating, taking notes on books, and giveaways/contests were not very popular in the data.

Instead of **book lists**, the store wanted to focus on their Local Author's Corner.

Book clubs were not seen as necessary, but could be tied into in-store events.

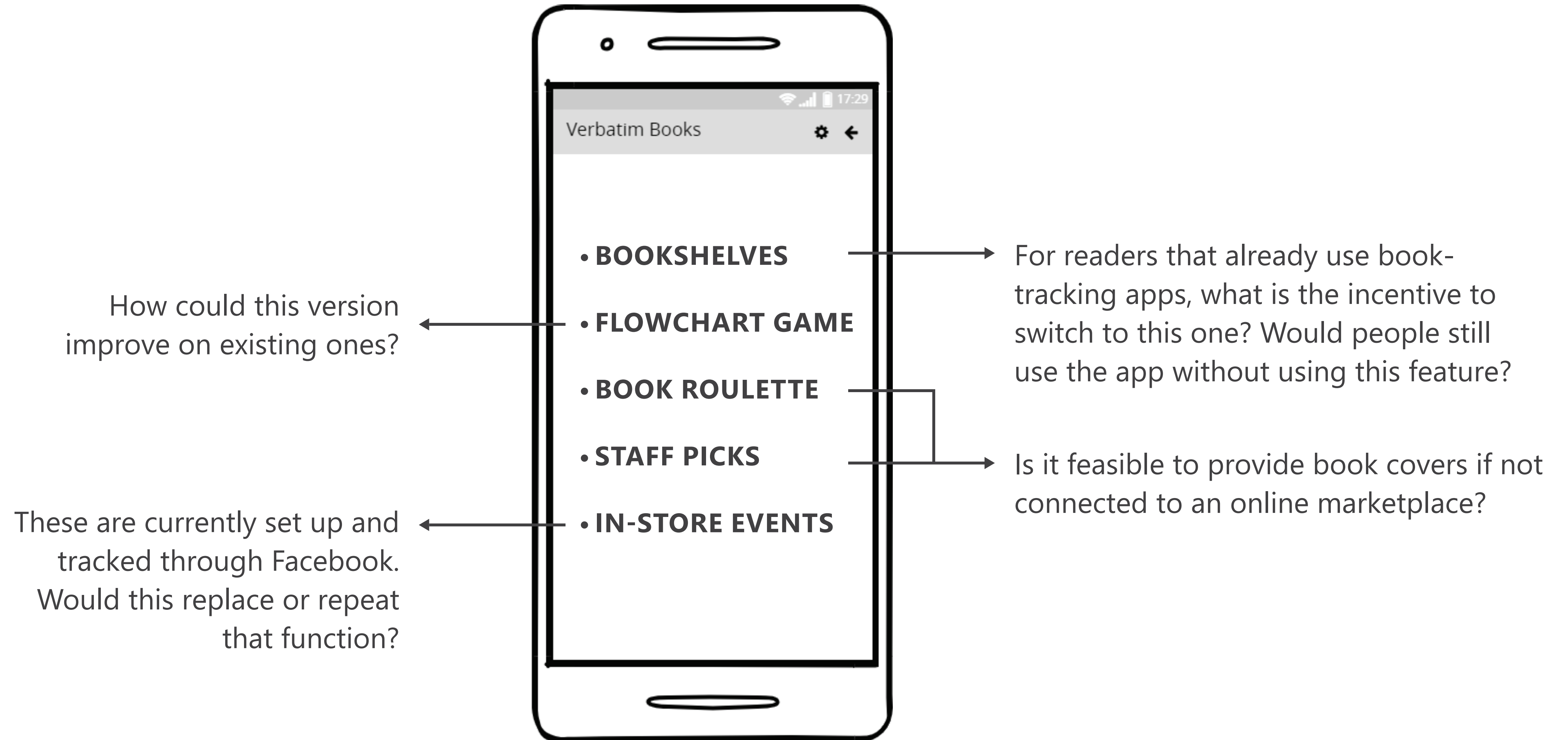
PERSONAL

- **Bookshelves**
- ~~Purchasing~~
- **Flowchart to pick next book**
- **Book roulette**
- ~~Rating books~~
- ~~Taking notes on books~~

COMMUNITY

- **Writing and/or reading rec's**
- ~~Book lists~~
- ~~Book clubs~~
- ~~Giveaways/contests~~
- ~~Sharing reading progress~~
- **In-store events**

What are the considerations for each feature?



A mobile app would not be the best investment of the store's time and resources.

- **I couldn't find any apps for independent bookstores** - not enough value added that couldn't be accomplished with a website or social media.
- There **didn't seem to be a strong incentive** for anyone to switch from tracking their books on Goodreads or similar.
- Book covers would likely involve a **costly investment to access an image database** - probably not cost-effective, unless adding an online bookstore.
- The **store was able to survive and thrive through the pandemic** with Facebook and Instagram accounts.

Not every business needs an app.

KEY OUTCOMES & RESULTS

- An app would not be the best solution for growing Verbatim Books' foot traffic and sales.
- For community connection, the store is focusing on its social media content and hosting in-store events.
- It's also continually updating the store's interior and exterior to create a unique sense of place.

WHAT I LEARNED

- Not every business goal can be solved with an app.
- It was an enlightening exercise to try to produce an app with the aim of it not being used very often.