

Project Proposal: Operation Baby Gear

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Description of the Problem Space

A new baby requires preparing both mentally and physically, and also monetarily. New families spend an average of \$12,000 and up to \$30,000 outfitting their homes for a new baby in the first year of life, and that number is repeated and increased every year thereafter. Everything from cribs to rocking chairs, to Mr. Boppys and Sophie dolls, to bottle warmers to diapers are included on the growing list of items required for a new baby. The amount a family spends on a new baby can be influenced by a number of factors - parenting styles, general consumption patterns, access and proximity to hand-me-downs from family or friends, baby registries, recommendations from others (in person and online). Yet in hindsight, many parents complain that they bought too many items, used expensive items only once or twice, or their baby's preferences didn't align with particular products.

Parents ultimately want to do the right thing for their children, but finding the "correct" items is difficult. Furthermore, babies grow fast, so certain items may only be relevant during a certain development stage, only to become obsolete within a few days, weeks or months as the baby grows. These items must then be discarded, stored, donated, or resold, adding additional burden to a new parent's everyday life and household logistics.

While sustainable and multi-use baby items are gaining some traction, a tremendous gap still exists between sustainable, stress-free baby items and the current expensive and wasteful paradigm. Even in the world of Amazon reviews and countless mommy blogs, new parents are often still overwhelmed by figuring out what items are necessary, optional, or just nice-to-have for their new babies. This project proposes to explore:

How Might We

- Make planning and accessing baby gear easier, less expensive, stressful, and wasteful?
- Connect new parents to better information about what gear they want/need and provide support better decision making on baby-related purchases? Recommend gear based on parenting styles or preferences?
- Foster a sense of place-based community between new parents in a way that enables sharing of information, education, support, and collaborative consumption?

Research Approach

We are expecting our research to take place over three main phases, as outlined below:

Phase 1: Getting to know the space

Timeframe: March 20 - April 3 (2 weeks)

- "Web eavesdropping"
 - Finnish baby box, UK NCT
 - Barkbox, Trunk Club, StitchFix
 - Rent the runway
 - Shyp
- Analogous examples
 - Finnish baby box, UK NCT
 - Barkbox, Trunk Club, StitchFix
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- Facebook survey

Phase 2: Generative research

Timeframe: March 23 - April 14 (4 weeks)

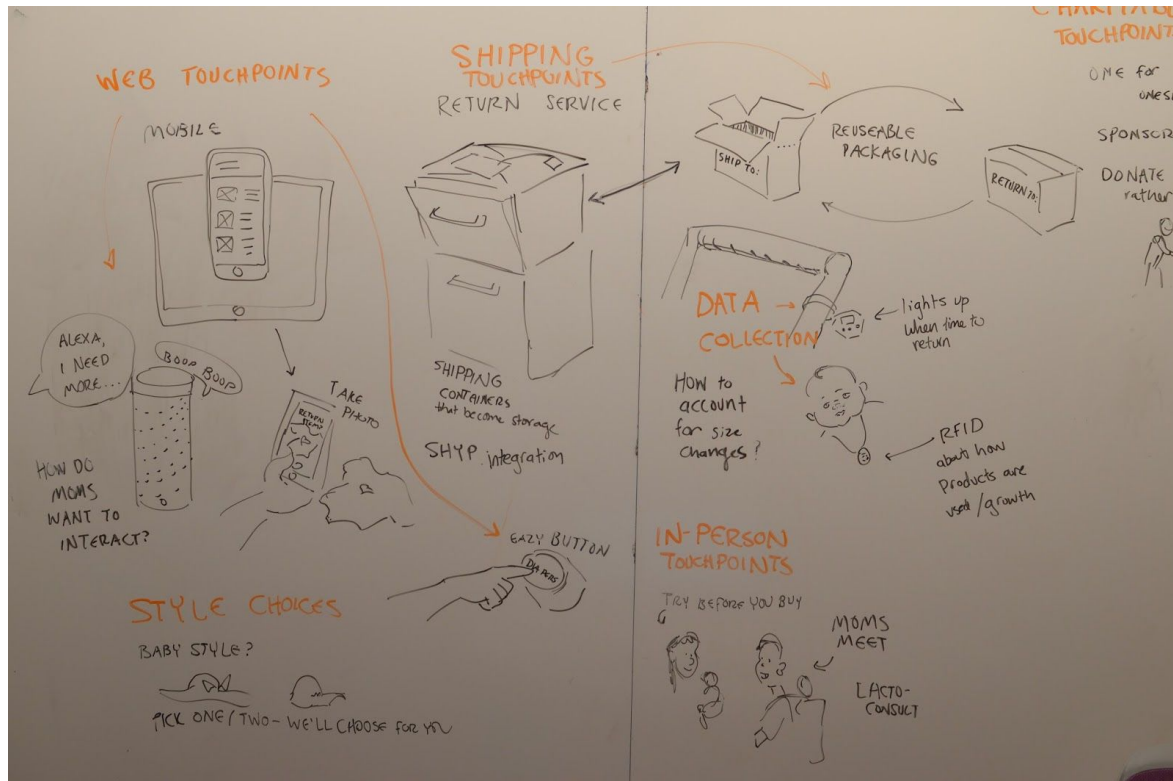
- Baby shopping observation (in Target?)
- Contextual inquiry/ guided tours in home and/or baby registry
 - Expecting
 - New parents
 - Older kids
- Interviews
 - Expecting parents
 - New moms/ dads
 - Used baby gear shop owner

Phase 3: Evaluative research

Timeframe: April 24 - May 5 (1.5 weeks)

- Sharing prototypes with interview participants

Ecosystem Possibilities



In our early thoughts about where this research might take us, we have imagined a delivery service for baby gear. We are inspired by monthly “surprise” subscription boxes like BarkBox and Trunk Club as well as specific rental services like Rent the Runway. Additionally, sharing economies like car sharing and second-hand stores could provide functional inspiration. With these various companies in mind, and with the intent to reduce waste, simplify decision-making and reduce parental burden we have come up with the following areas and potential ecosystem components.

Packaging and Shipping

In order to facilitate an exchange or purchasing of baby gear, we imagine we will need to address the element of packaging, from both a service experience and logistics perspective. Services like BarkBox rely on the USPS or other shipping service. Cardboard boxes or other shipping materials can be wasteful if not reused or made multi-purpose. What if:

- Each user gets two boxes to be used over and over, one at home and the other with the service (much like a CSA)
- How could shipping tags and return labels have more information or be easier to use?
- What if the shipping container doubles as storage or drawers?

Mobile app/ web experience

Regardless of what type of service we design, there will be a web-based touchpoint. Users will need to enter their information, purchase or select new items, connect with community and so on. What if:

- Desktop website with ecommerce/exchange component
- Tablet or Phone app
- Built-in recommendations based on previous selections and/ or a knowledge base
- Easy returns and shipping/ ordering
- Gift registry/ baby shower tool

Data collection mechanism(s)

How could we track information about the products once they arrive at the family's home? Could provide real-time feedback about hours of usage, when/ where and whether or not items function as intended.

- Wearable necklace on baby/ parent that tracks interactions with rented gear?
- Smart buttons on the gear
- Integration with baby growth data as gear requirements and restrictions are often tied to baby weight or development milestones

In-person touchpoints

We suspect that many stay-at-home moms and dads are eager to connect with other parents. How could an in person experience evolve the brand or service and create community and educational opportunities?

- Pop up shops where you can test gear, take classes, meet other parents
- Coordination of new mom meetups and/or support groups?
- Delivery person is a lactation consultant (for example)

Charitable elements

It's likely that a service like this will be used by affluent parents, and we think they might like to give back to other parents of lesser means. How could we make this easy for them to do?

- One-for-one Onesies (like Toms shoes)
- Donate a used stroller rather than return it for credit
- Be paired with a family in need
- Set it and forget it donation opt-in