Resume

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Experience

Senior User Experience Designer

ActiveHealth Management, 2017-present

- Provide design and product research and direction for five product teams
- Provide hands-on assistance to improve software development and accessibility practices
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- Champion accessibility across the organization

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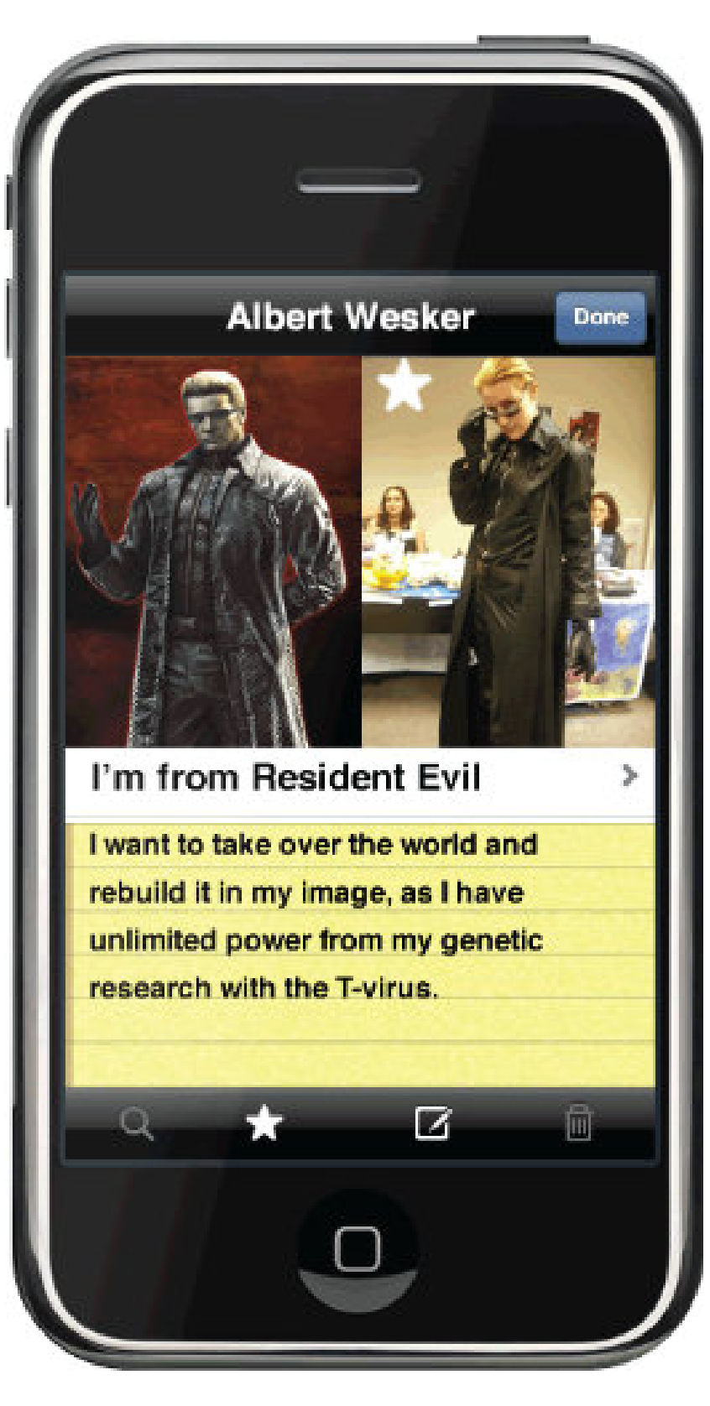

I'm from Resident Evil

I want to take over the world and rebuild it in my image, as I have unlimited power from my genetic research with the T-virus.

Tales of Badges

Connecting people at conventions through the love of cosplay

Cosplay in action – Britain and USA from Axis Powers Hetalia (from Genericon 2010).

Background and problem space

What is cosplay?

Cosplay is the art of becoming of one's favorite character from anime, television, and comic books, and other pop culture icons. Cosplayers gather (5.5 million in the United States alone) at conventions across the world to share their passion with the world and find other people who share their love.

And what problem does this design solve?

"While I love to cosplay, **I want people to engage with me** and the love of my character, **but I am often uncomfortable in front of other people** while in character."

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User research

What makes people interact with cosplayers?

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I learned the following from this research:

1. Observers would only interact with cosplays that were familiar or piqued their interest
2. Observers who thought the quality of the costume was exceptional would also create an opportunity to interact with the cosplayer

Conducting interviews with cosplayers

During this time, I also conducted interviews of five cosplayers to understand their motivations for cosplay, why they enjoy this activity, and what causes them to interact with others while in character. There was one particular quote that inspired me to try cosplay myself to gain firsthand knowledge to solve the problem:

"Everyone has a reason to cosplay – **whether it's to fit in or it's to break out** of their introversion. **When I wear a costume, I am much more social** and people just come to me. **It's a confidence booster** that makes me stay physically fit."

Trying out cosplay for myself

I learned how to sew from my friends and put together my own costume.

It was much more difficult than I had anticipated, but I was able to assemble all of the pieces of my character and travel to a convention to try out cosplay and see what I could learn from the experience firsthand.

I spent one day at a convention to play the role of "observer"

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By attending a convention, what I had learned from my interviews, experiments, and focus group was confirmed. I also saw an opportunity for a design solution, as observers would take pictures of well-done costumes (whether familiar to them or not) and **interact with each other as if they were close friends.**

Using design thinking to solve the problem

Sketching the opportunity to solve the problem

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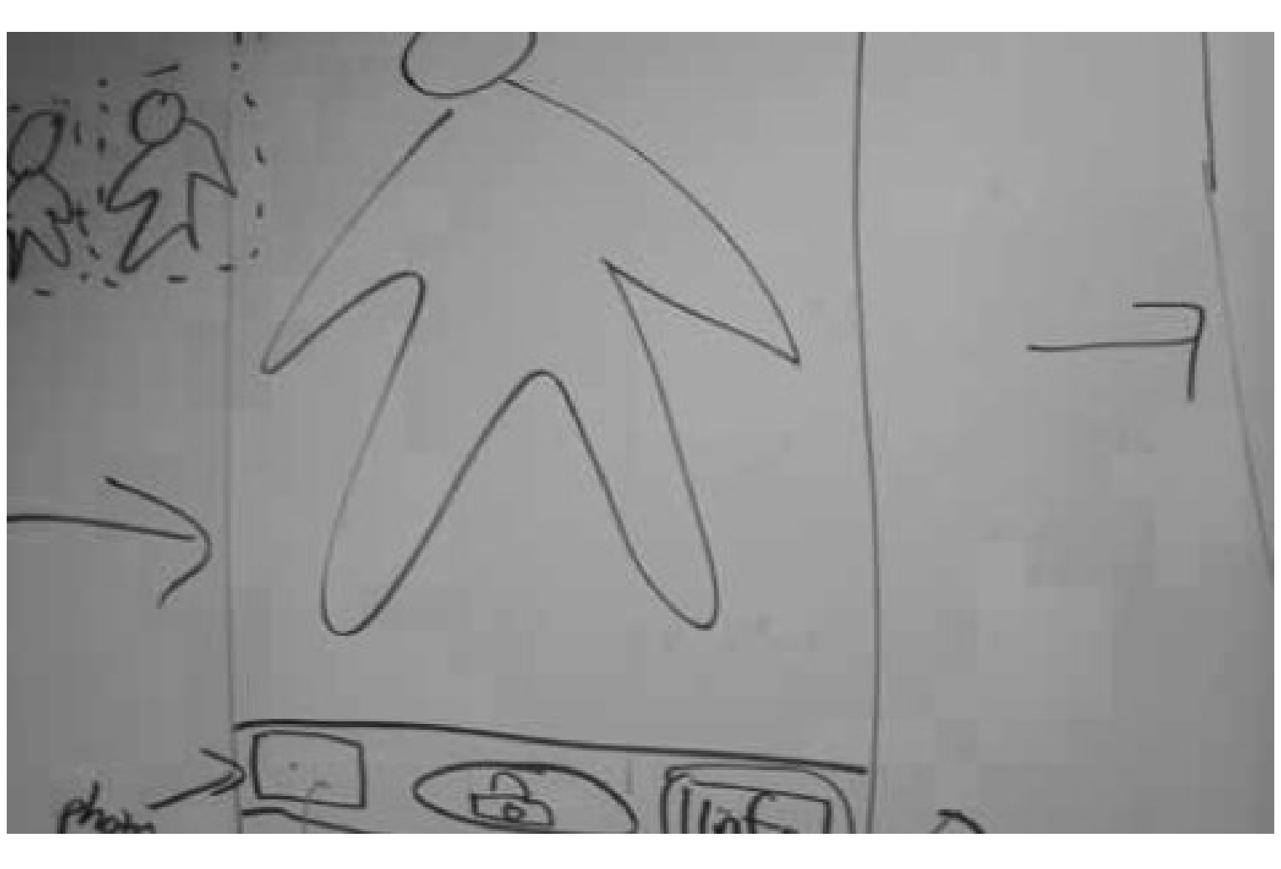
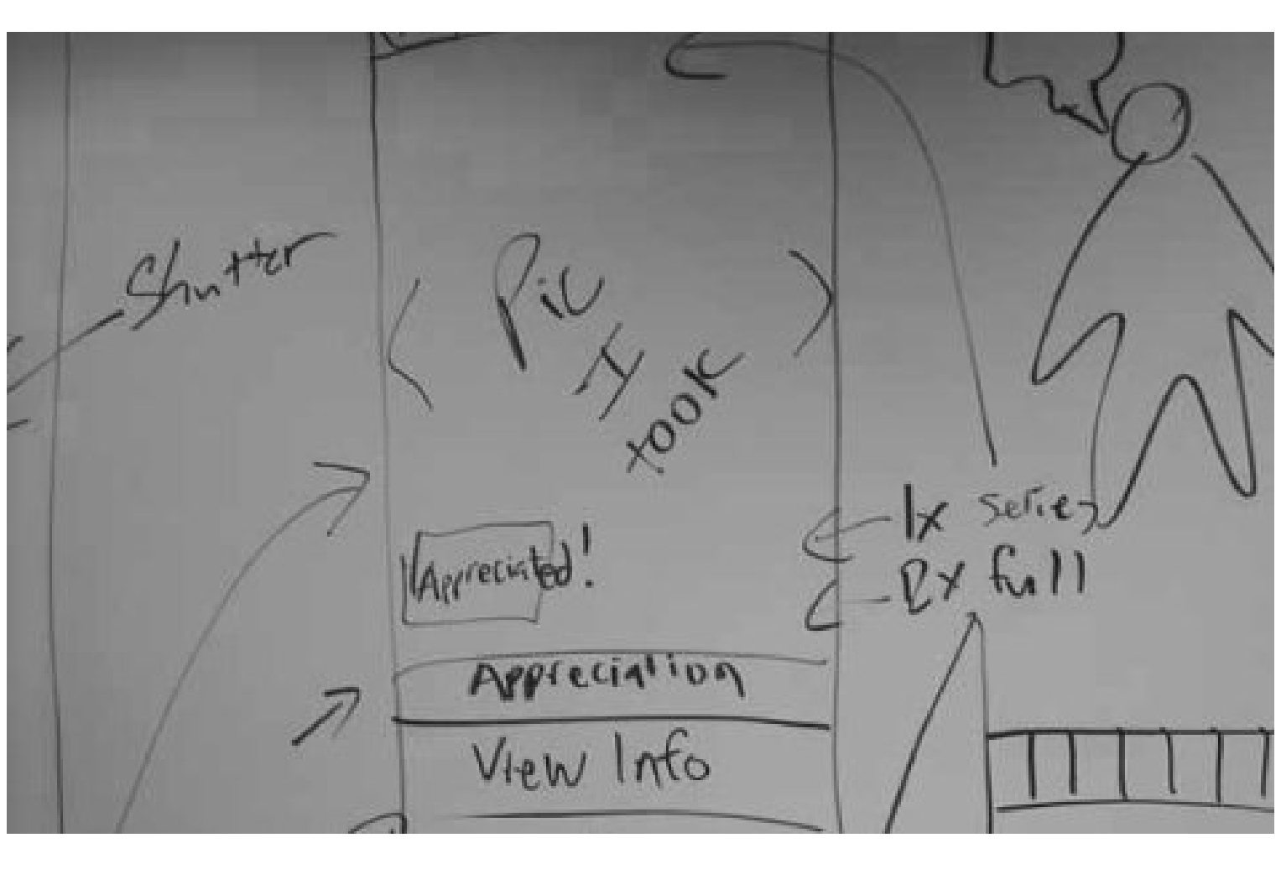
High-level sketches of experience



A smartphone app could recognize a costume



The observer would be given an opportunity to learn about the character

While this wasn't the only concept I had made, it seemed like the most logical and natural solution because it **provided an opportunity for people to interact with the unknown** in a new, almost magical way, that didn't take away from the experience of going to a convention.

How the experience would work

This design may seem rather simple, but the design would actually be doing the following on behalf of the observer:

- **The design would use image recognition on the costume to find the character and cosplayer**
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Validating the design approach

Prototyping the experience on paper

To validate my assumptions about the design approach, I made a paper prototype of the experience to see if the solution would match the needs of observers.

Participants would pull up their phone and take a picture

And I would play the computer to show the participant a snapshot of the experience

After multiple rounds of testing, I learned the following:

- **The core experience worked well and was fun for the observer**
- **Each observer had different needs to learn about the character (some wanted a full description, some wanted to know about the cosplayer, and others wanted the universe they were from and the character**
- **Observers wanted to leave feedback and appreciation for a job well done**

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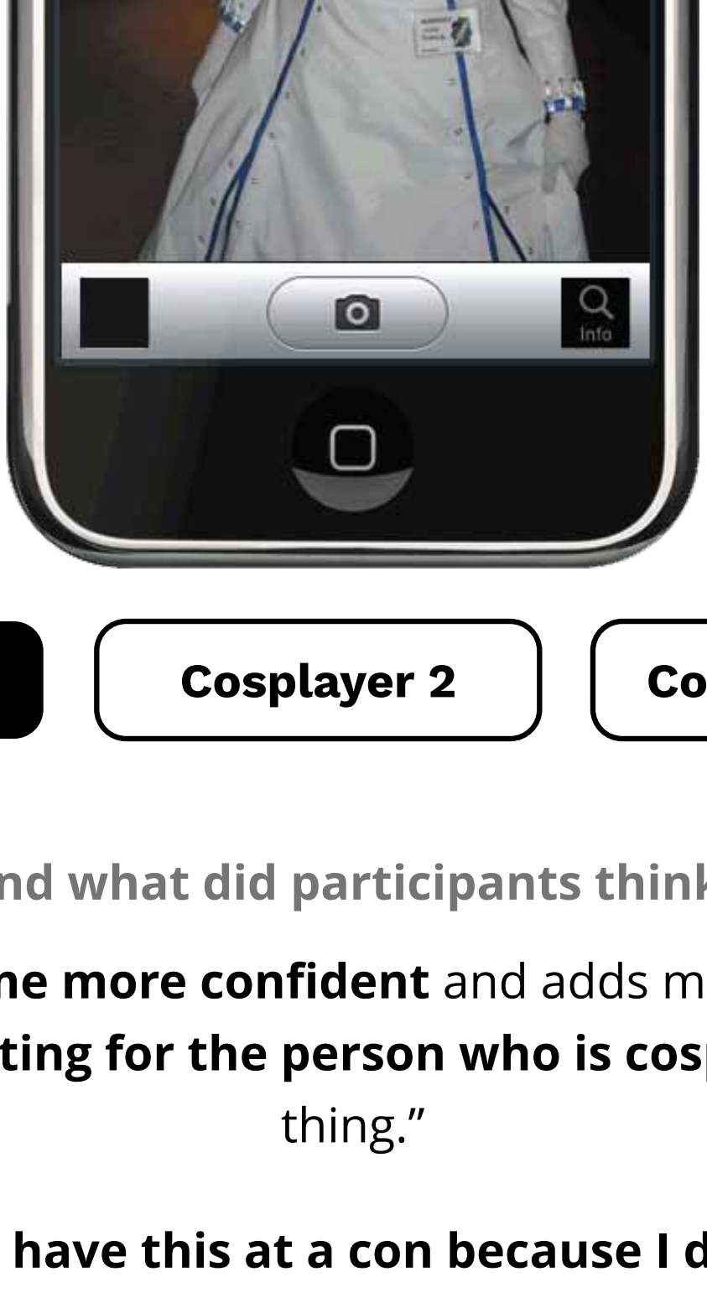
In addition to testing the experience on paper, I invited four additional participants to test the experience. I asked them to take a photo and leave a comment of each cosplayer. You can try the experience, too.



Cosplayer 1 **Cosplayer 2** **Cosplay group**

And what did participants think?

"The design **made me more confident** and adds more emphasis to the cosplay. **It's more exciting for the person who is cosplaying** – that's the big thing."

"**It would be handy to have this at a con because I don't know them all.** If you can use an iPhone, you can use this."

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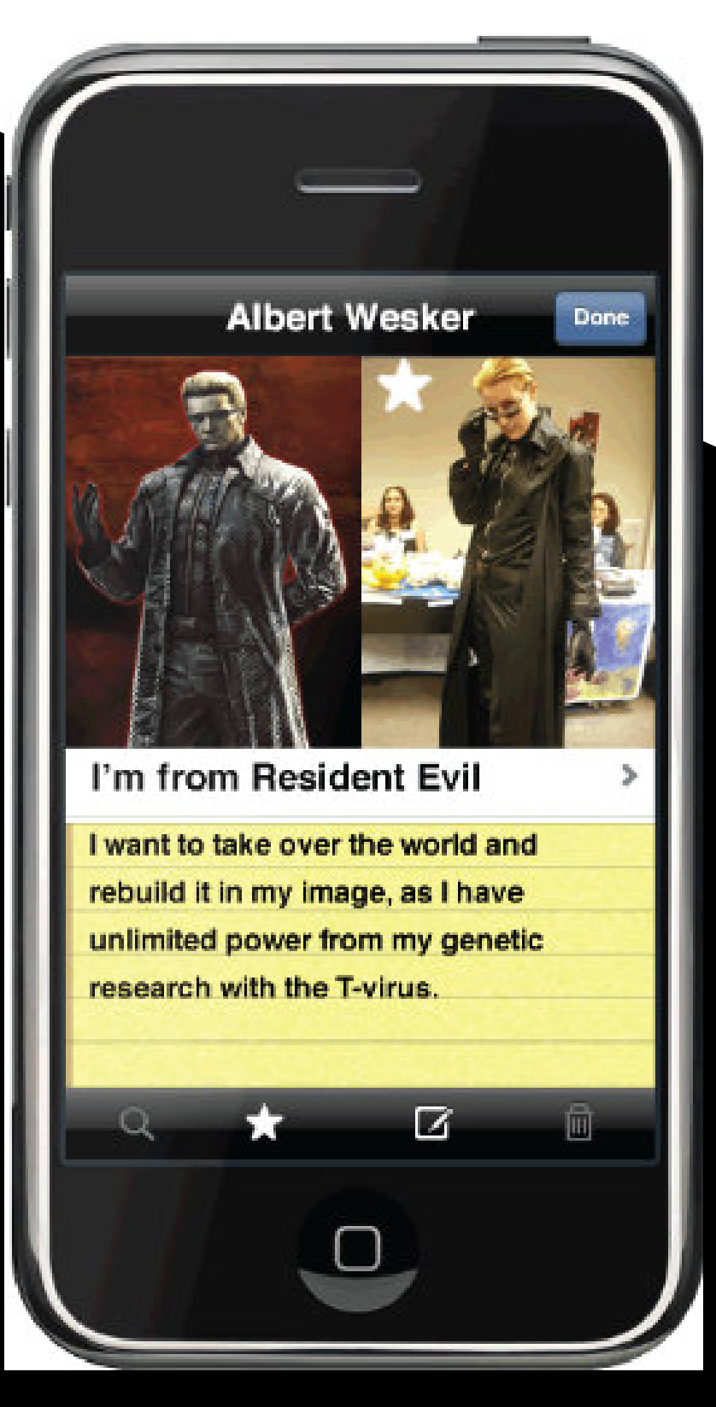

Albert Wesker

Done

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Watching how people talk about cosplayers

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Trying out cosplay for myself

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I spent one day at a convention to play the role of "observer"

I spent one day at a convention to play the role of "cosplayer"

What Not to Wear:
Cosplay Edition
Jennifer Ash and Casey Addy
Genericon 2010

I was also fortunate to speak to other cosplayers at a panel

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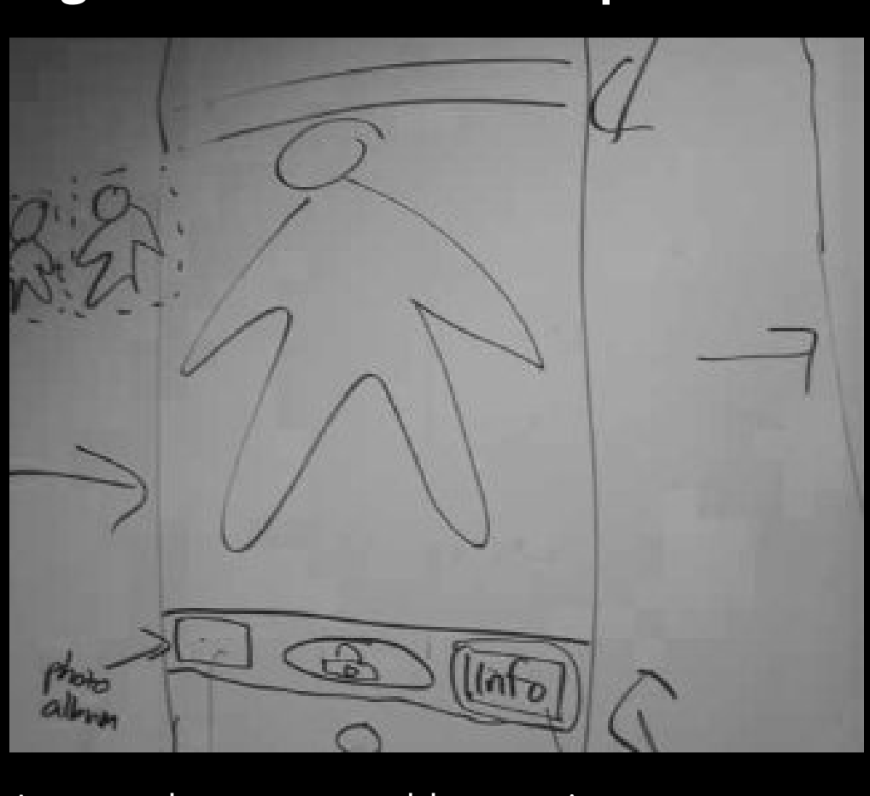

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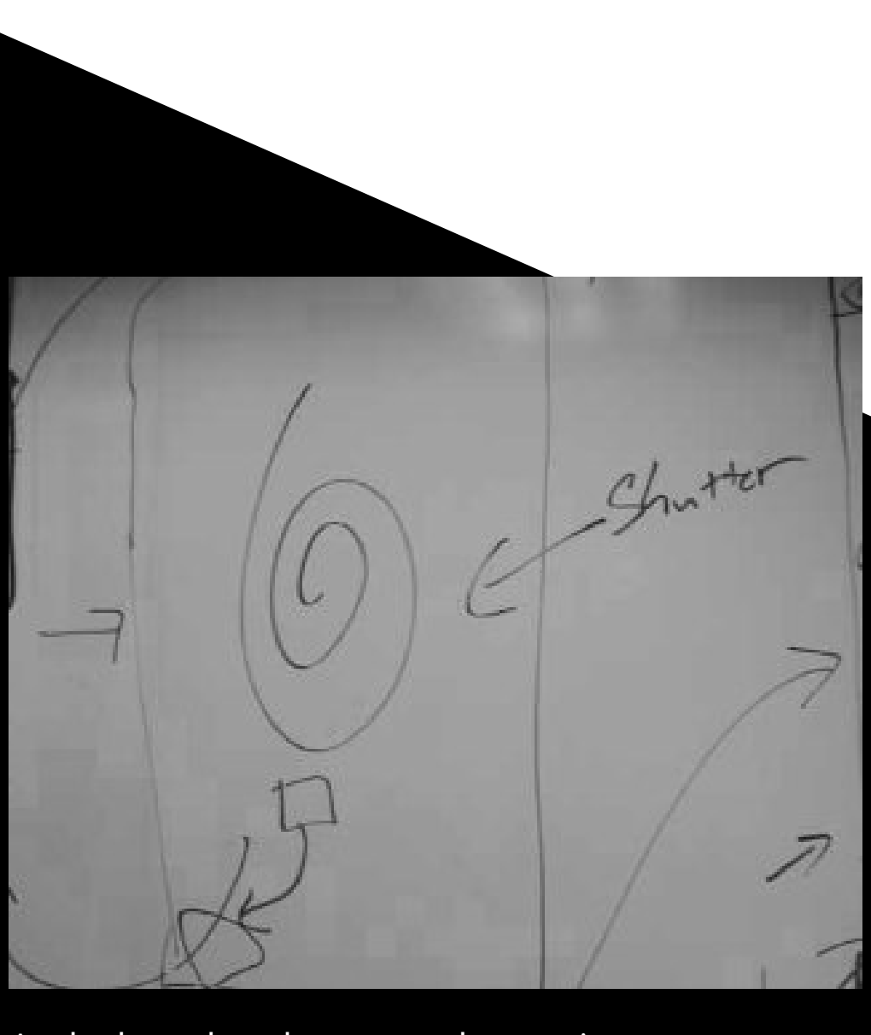
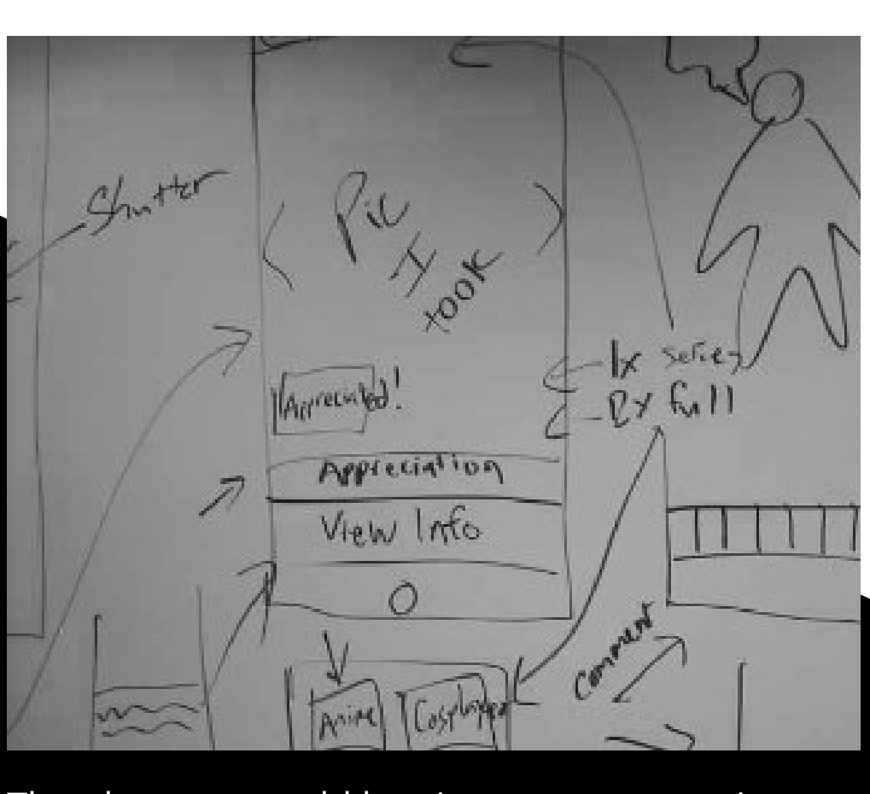


And when the observer takes a picture



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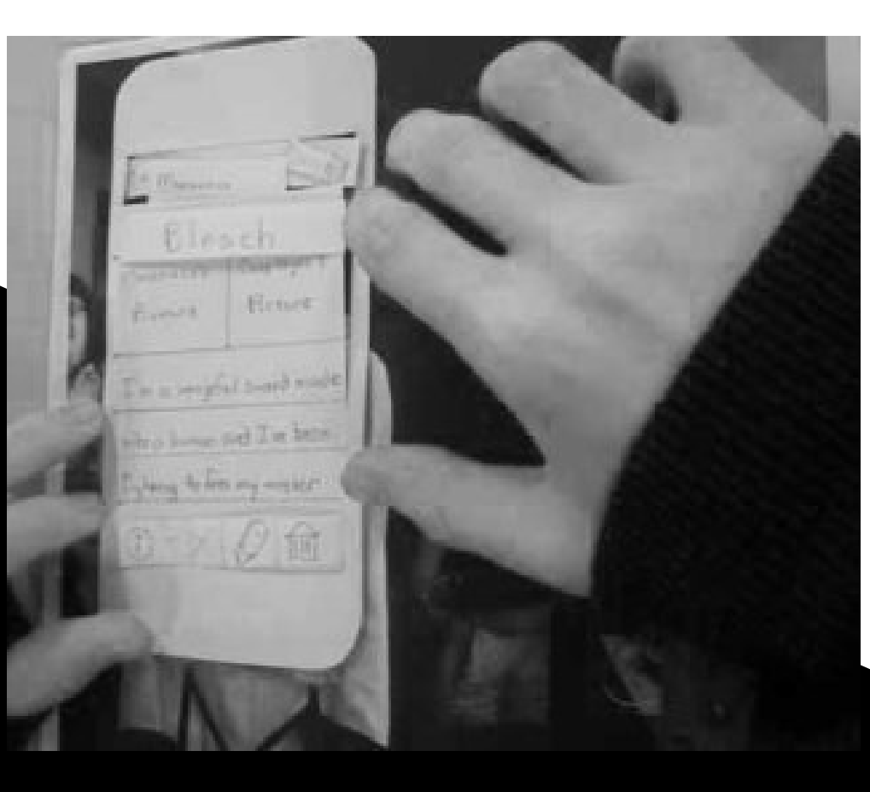

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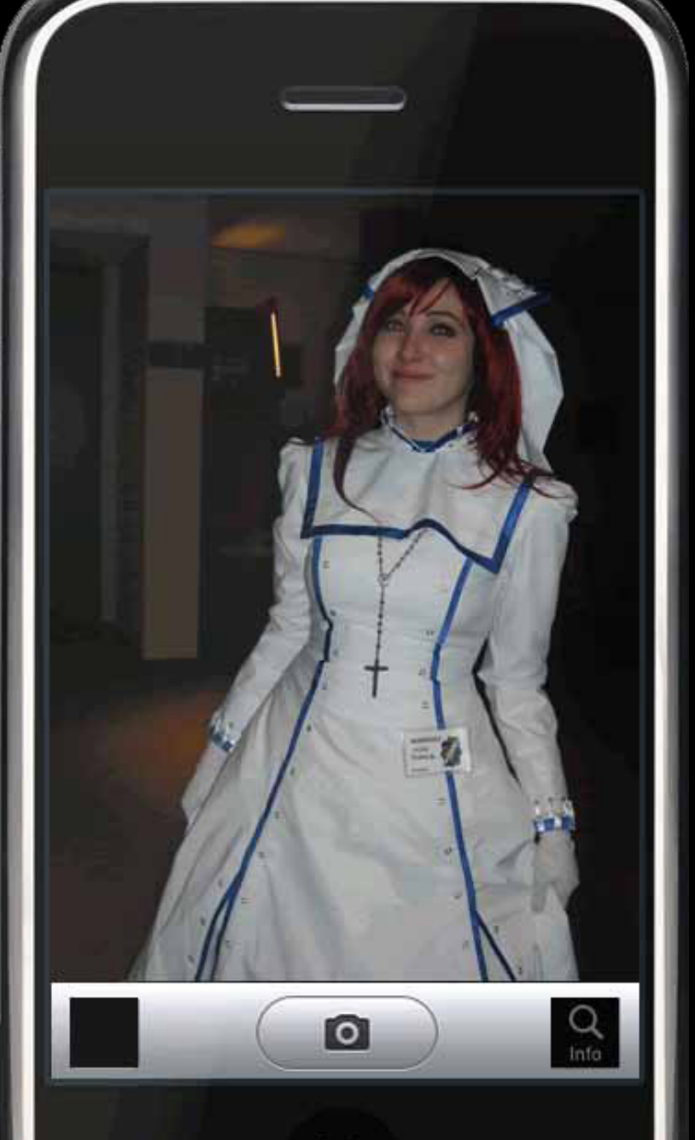

Cosplayer 1

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Cosplay group

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Tales of Badges

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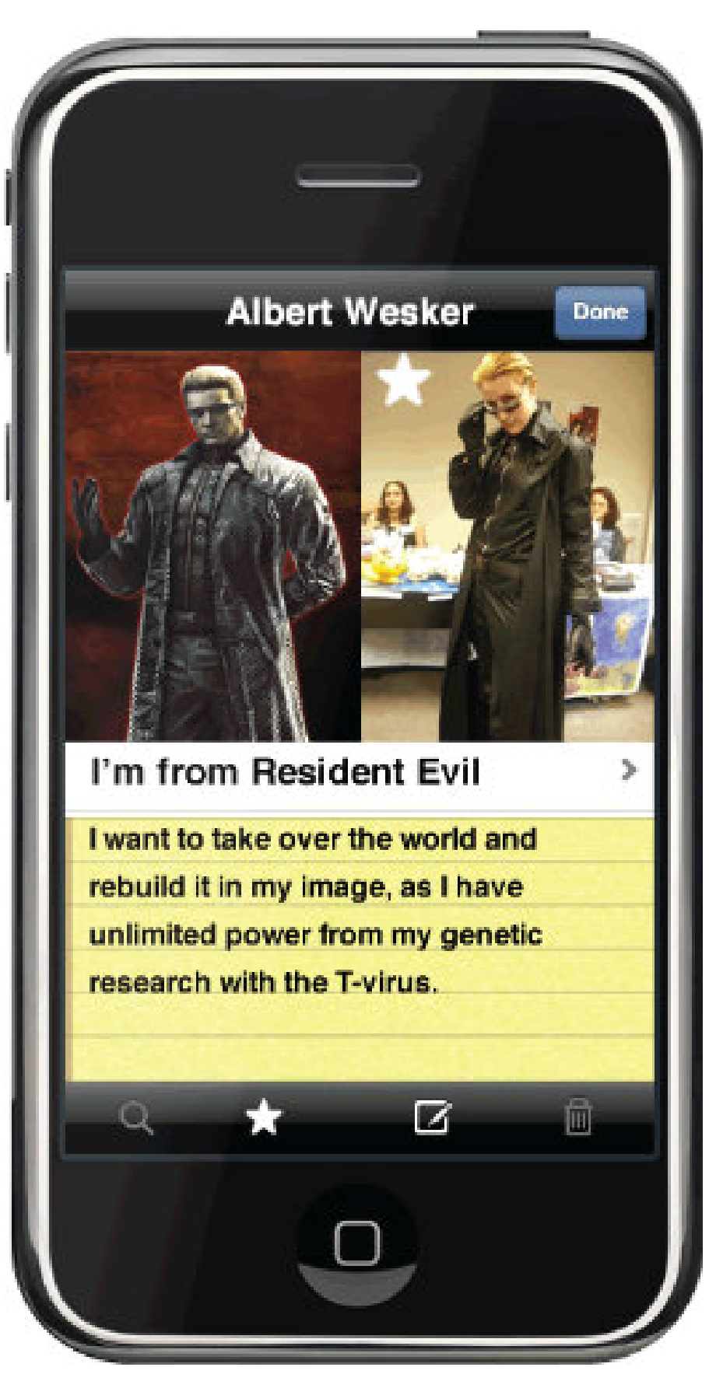

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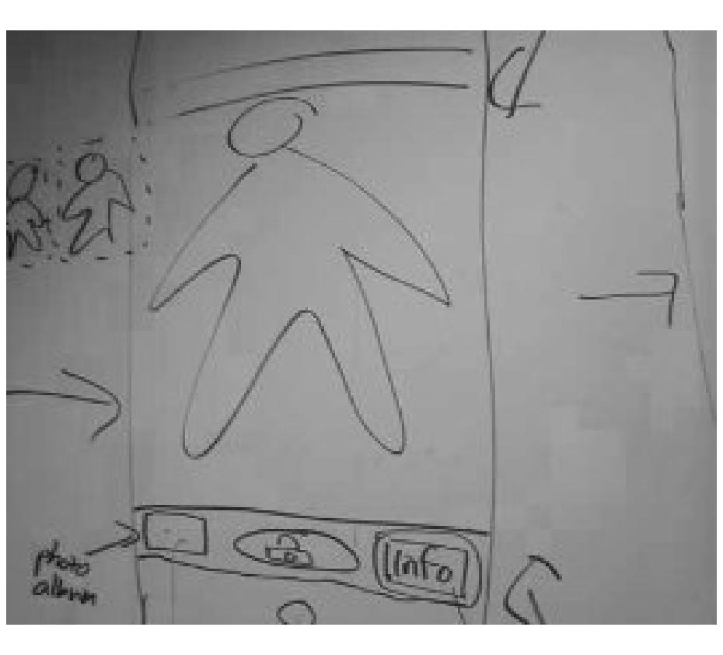

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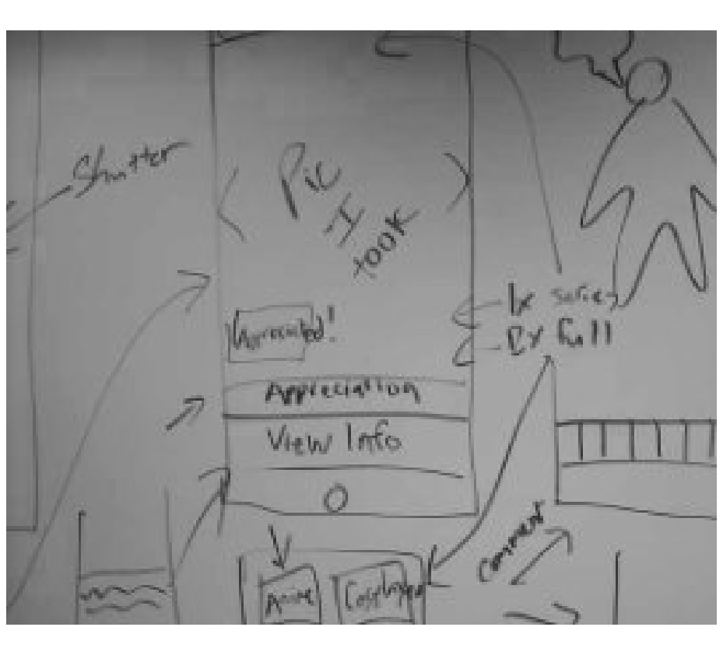

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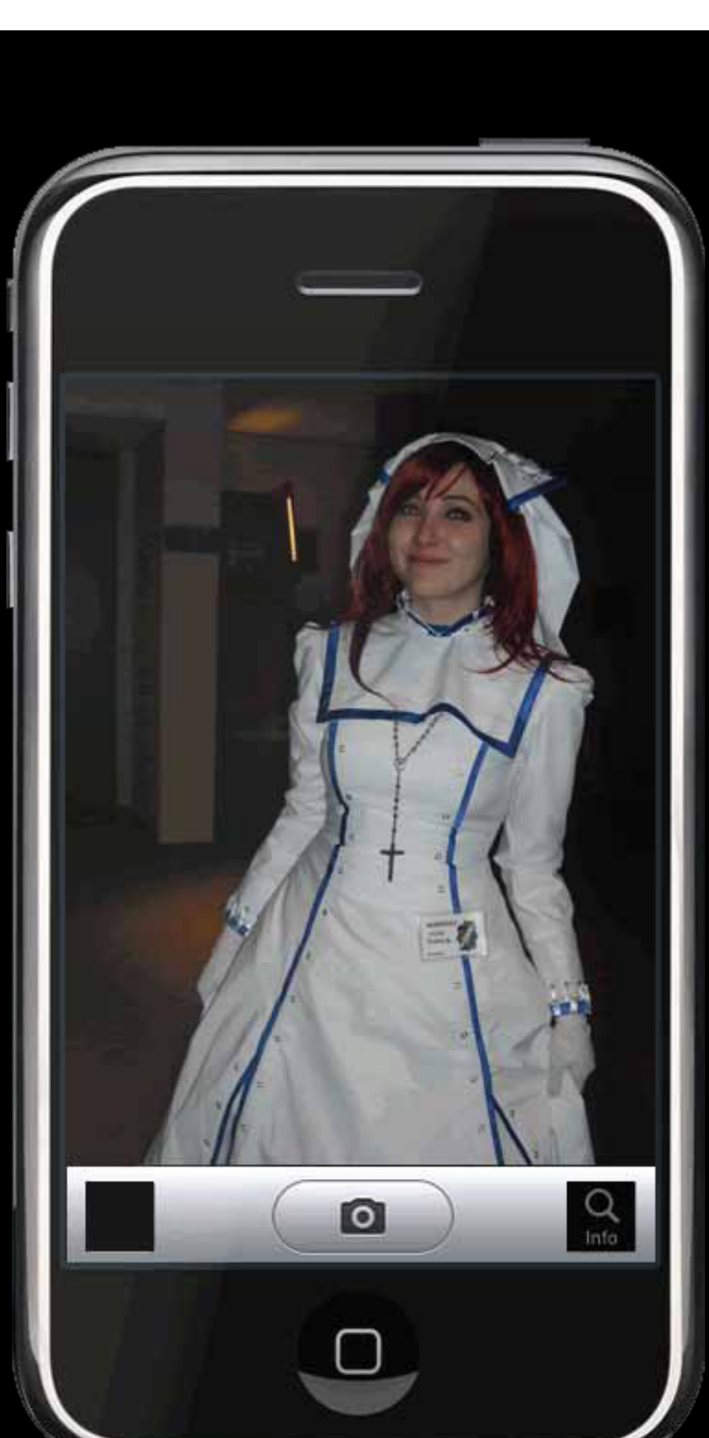

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GameZombie.tv, 2009-2010

- Led design strategy and execution of GameZombie.tv
- Winner of two 2010 Student Webby Awards

Additional relevant experience

- Research Assistant, Shareable Interfaces Research Group, 2009-2010
- Design Consultant, Hanapin Marketing, 2009
- Associate Instructor, Indiana University, 2008-2010
- Writing consultant, RPI Center for Communication Practices, 2007-2008

Key skills

Accessibility and development tools

Aria
Bootstrap
HTML/CSS/JavaScript
PHP
React
WCAG 2.0, 2.1
Wordpress

Design tools

Axure
Adobe design suite
Balsamiq Mockups
Microsoft Office
Pen and paper
Responsive web design
Sketch app
Sketching
Storyboarding
Wireframing

Research methods

Affinity diagramming
Card sorting
Competitive analysis
Contextual design
Heuristic evaluation
Interviews
Journey mapping
Paper prototyping
Participatory design
Usability testing

Education

MS, Human-Computer Interaction/design

Indiana University, 2010

BS, Electronic Media, Arts, and Communication

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, 2008

BS, Computer Science

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, 2008

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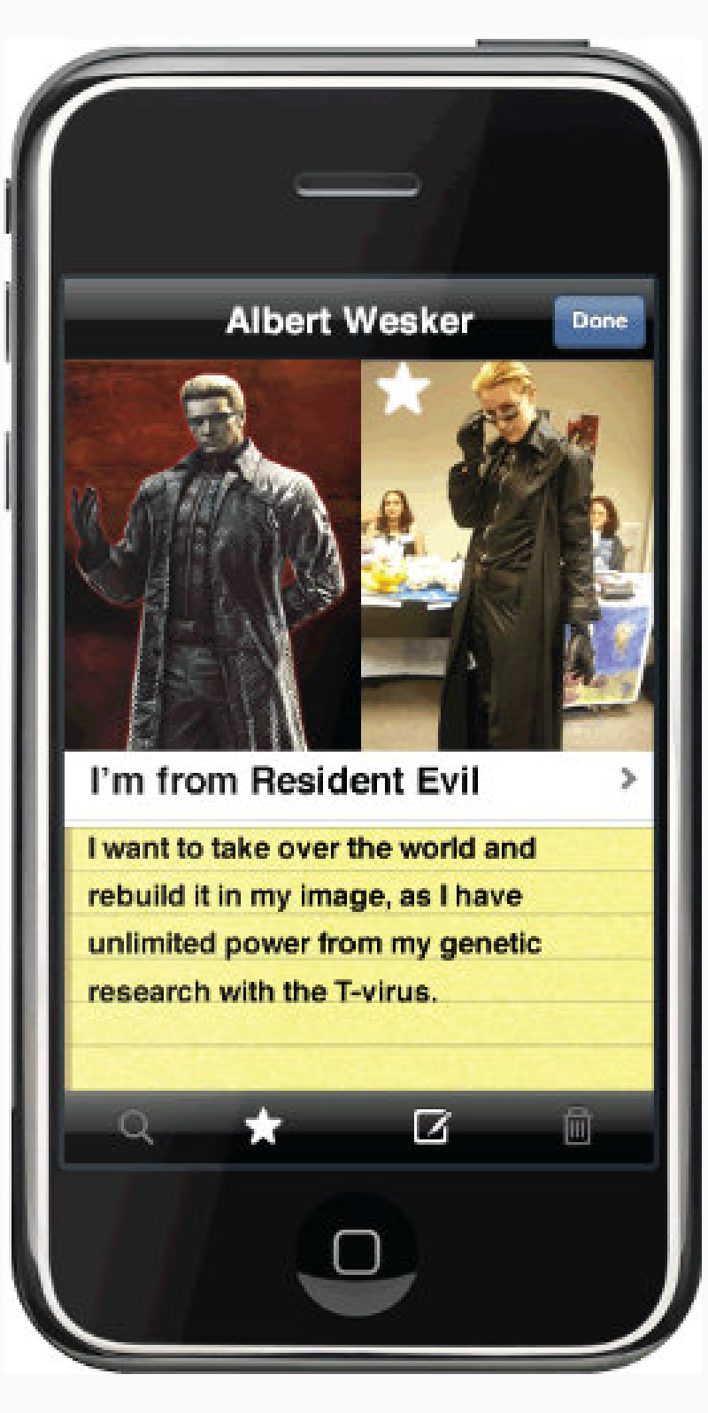
Tales of Badges

Connecting people at conventions through the love of cosplay



Albert Wesker

I'm from Resident Evil

I want to take over the world and rebuild it in my image, as I have unlimited power from my genetic research with the T-virus.

Background and problem space

What is cosplay?

Cosplay is the art of becoming of one's favorite character from anime, television, and comic books, and other pop culture icons. Cosplayers gather (5.5 million in the United States alone) at conventions across the world to share their passion with the world and find other people who share their love.

Cosplay in action – Britain and USA from Axis Powers Hetalia (from Genericon 2010).

And what problem does this design solve?

"While I love to cosplay, **I want people to engage with me** and the love of my character, **but I am often uncomfortable in front of other people** while in character."

This quote from one of my interviews gave me the insight to create something that would allow him (and others) to be comfortable in character (and have more fun, too).

User research

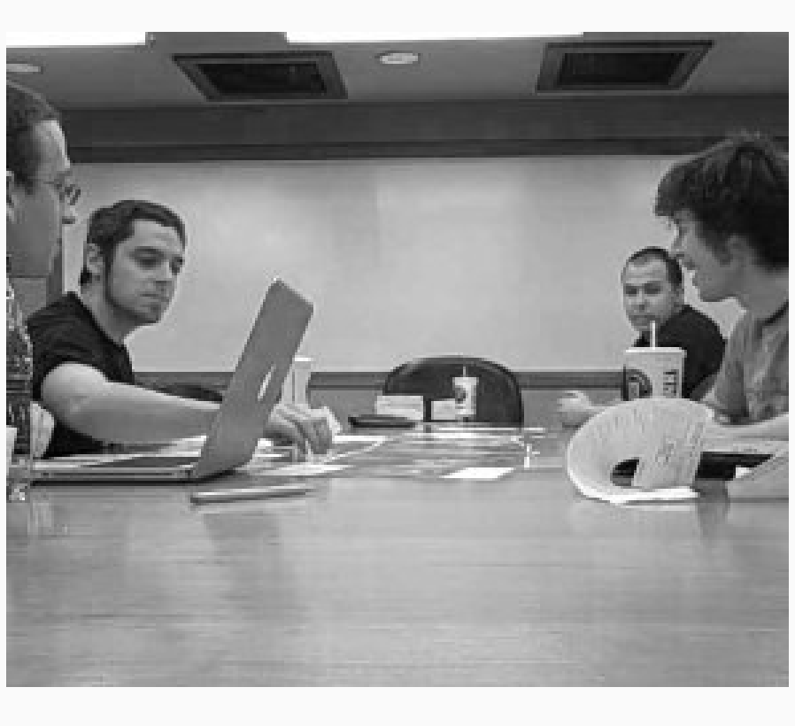
What makes people interact with cosplayers?

I started by attempting to understand what makes people interact with cosplayers by performing the following research:

Observing and learning from observers of cosplayers

Watching people interact with a life-size cardboard cutout of a cosplayer

Watching how people talk about cosplayers



Leading a focus group on observers and cosplay

I staged two "encounters" for observers to interact with cosplayers to see how they react to them. I supplemented this experiment by conducting a focus group of individuals who go to specific events (called conventions) where they have interacted with cosplayers firsthand.

I learned the following from this research:

1. Observers would only interact with cosplays that were familiar or piqued their interest
2. Observers who thought the quality of the costume was exceptional would also create an opportunity to interact with the cosplayer

Conducting interviews with cosplayers

During this time, I also conducted interviews of five cosplayers to understand their motivations for cosplay, why they enjoy this activity, and what causes them to interact with others while in character.

"Everyone has a reason to cosplay – **whether it's to fit in or it's to break out** of their introversion. **When I wear a costume, I am much more social** and people just come to me. **It's a confidence booster** that makes me stay physically fit."

This quote from one of my interviews gave me an insight I had not seen yet. I then decided to try cosplaying myself to learn more and become inspired about creating potential solutions.

Trying out cosplay for myself

I learned how to sew from my friends and put together my own costume.

It was much more difficult than I had anticipated, but I was able to assemble all of the pieces of my character and travel to a convention to try out cosplay and see what I could learn from the experience firsthand.

I spent one day at a convention to play the role of "observer"

I spent one day at a convention to play the role of "cosplayer"

What Not to Wear: Cosplay Edition
Jennifer Ash and Casey Addy
Genericon 2010

I was also fortunate to speak to other cosplayers at a panel

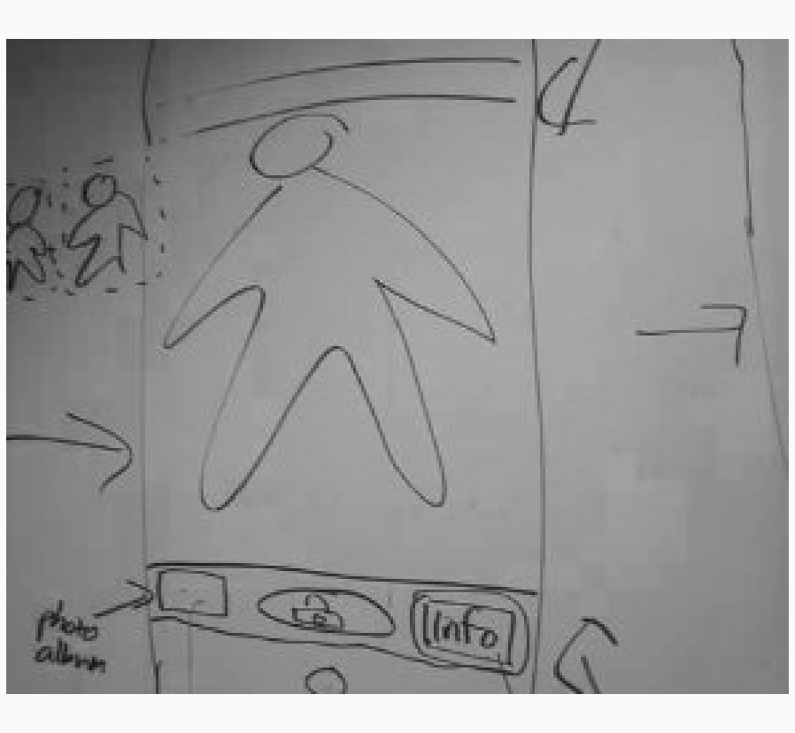
By attending a convention, what I had learned from my interviews, experiments, and focus group was confirmed. I also saw an opportunity for a design solution, as observers would take pictures of well-done costumes (whether familiar to them or not) and **interact with each other as if they were close friends.**

Using design thinking to solve the problem

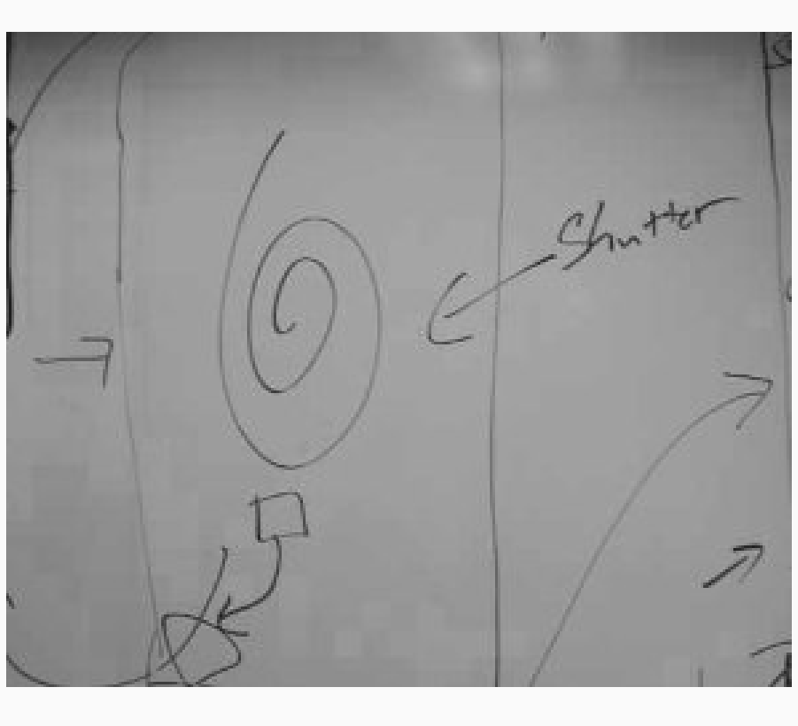
Sketching the opportunity to solve the problem

With this information I had learned from my user research and firsthand exposure to the problem space, I began sketching ways to solve the problem.

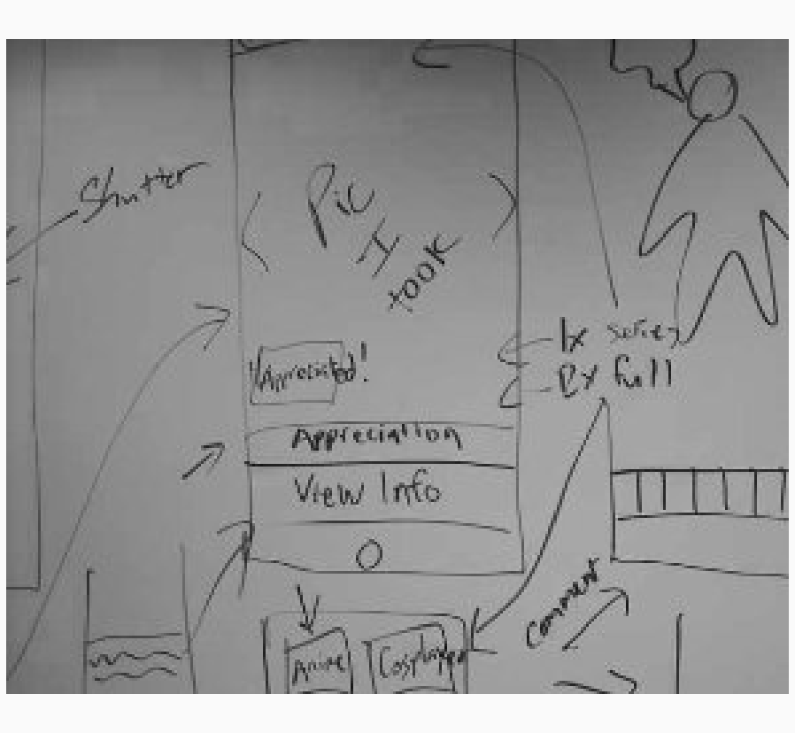
High-level sketches of experience



A smartphone app could recognize a costume



And when the observer takes a picture



The observer would be given an opportunity to learn about the character

While this wasn't the only concept I had made, it seemed like the most logical and natural solution because it **provided an opportunity for people to interact with the unknown** in a new, almost magical way, that didn't take away from the experience of going to a convention.

How the experience would work

This design may seem rather simple, but the design would actually be doing the following on behalf of the observer:

- **The design would use image recognition on the costume to find the character and cosplayer**
- **The design would also look up information about the character and the cosplayer in real-time to support and continue the interaction between observer and cosplayer**

Validating the design approach

Prototyping the experience on paper

To validate my assumptions about the design approach, I made a paper prototype of the experience to see if the solution would match the needs of observers.

I had participants select a cosplayer

Participants would pull up their phone and take a picture

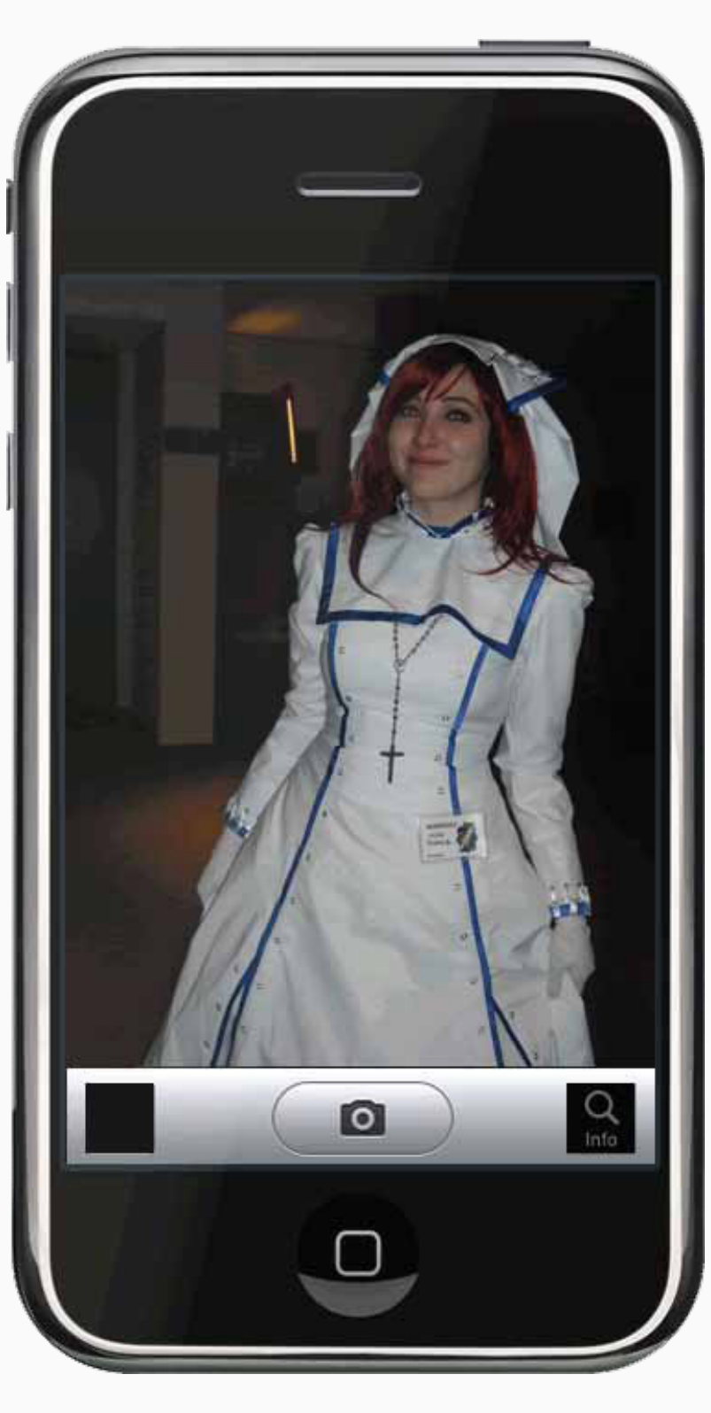
And I would play the computer to show the participant a snapshot of the experience

After multiple rounds of testing, I learned the following:

- **The core experience worked well and was fun for the observer**
- **Each observer had different needs to learn about the character (some wanted a full description, some wanted to know about the cosplayer, and others wanted the universe they were from and the character**
- **Observers wanted to leave feedback and appreciation for a job well done**

Testing a more refined experience

In addition to testing the experience on paper, I invited four additional participants to test the experience. I asked them to take a photo and leave a comment of each cosplayer. You can try the experience, too.



Cosplayer 1 **Cosplayer 2** **Cosplay group**

And what did participants think?

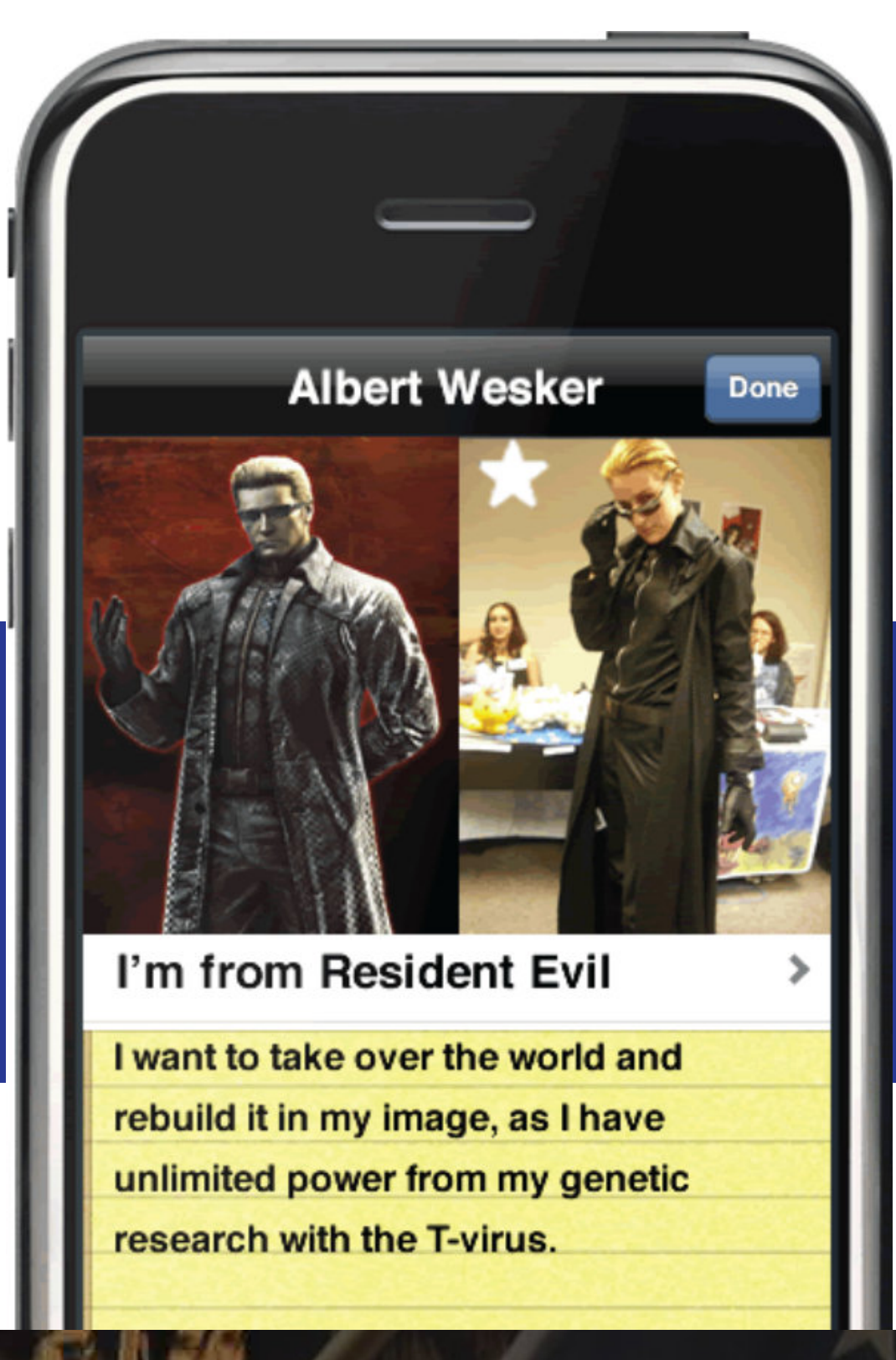
"The design **made me more confident** and adds more emphasis to the cosplay. **It's more exciting for the person who is cosplaying** – that's the big thing."

"**It would be handy to have this at a con because I don't know them all.** If you can use an iPhone, you can use this."

Participants were also excited to have a means to learn about the people around them at the convention, learn about new characters, and make new friends.

Tales of Badges

Connecting people at conventions through the love of cosplay


Albert Wesker
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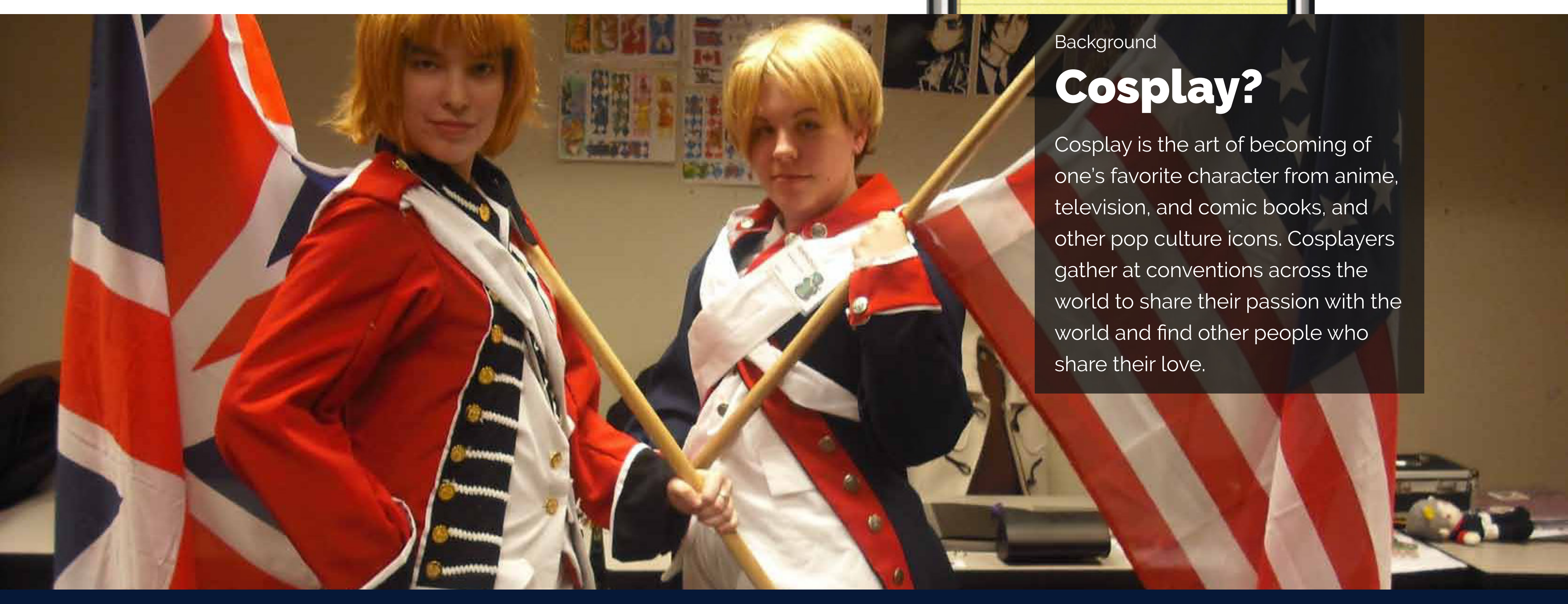


Background

Cosplay?

Cosplay is the art of becoming of one's favorite character from anime, television, and comic books, and other pop culture icons. Cosplayers gather at conventions across the world to share their passion with the world and find other people who share their love.

Motivation and challenge

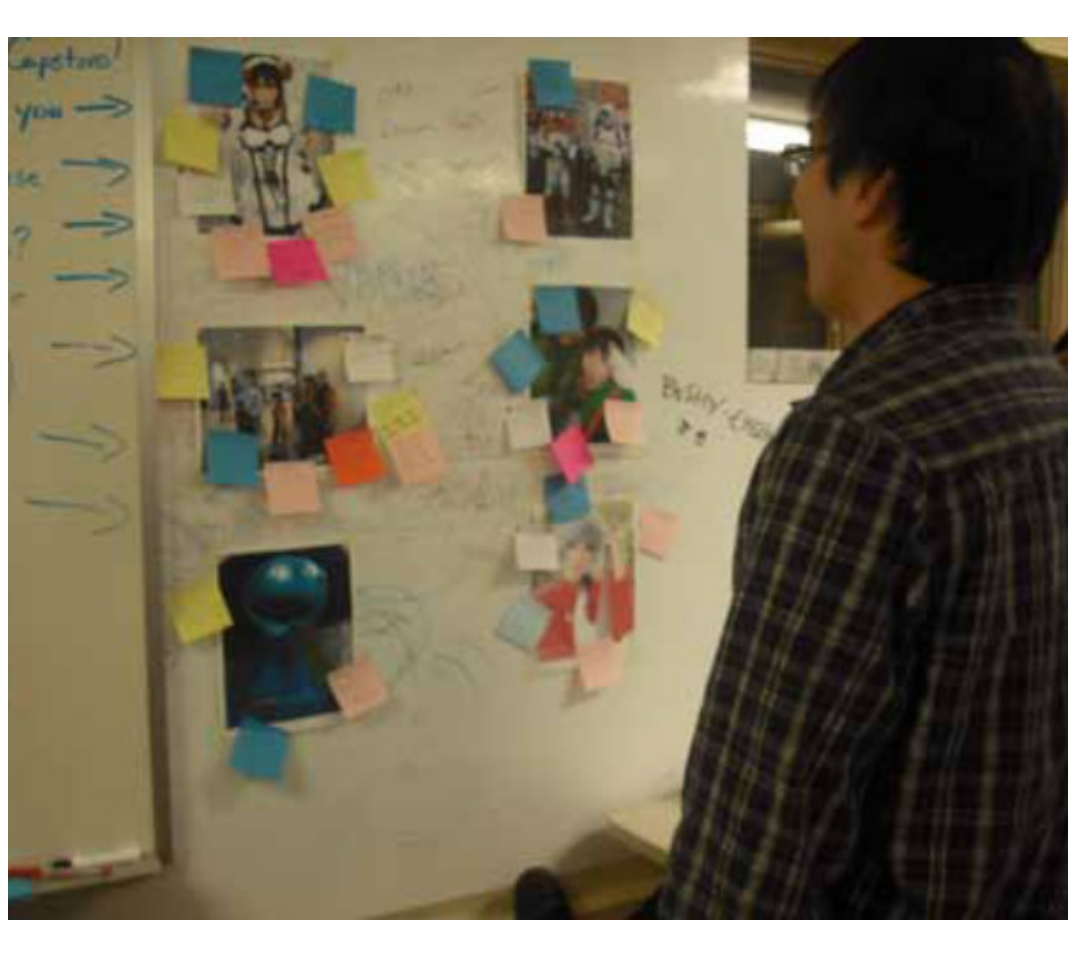
"While I love to cosplay, **I want people to engage me** and the love of my character, **but I am often uncomfortable in front of other people** in character."

This quote from one of my interviews gave me the spark to create a product that would make him comfortable in character.

User research

What causes people to interact with cosplayers?

I first staged an experiment with a cardboard cutout of a famous character. I put him in a commmon area and observed how people would interact with him. I learned that people would interact with him if they knew the character.

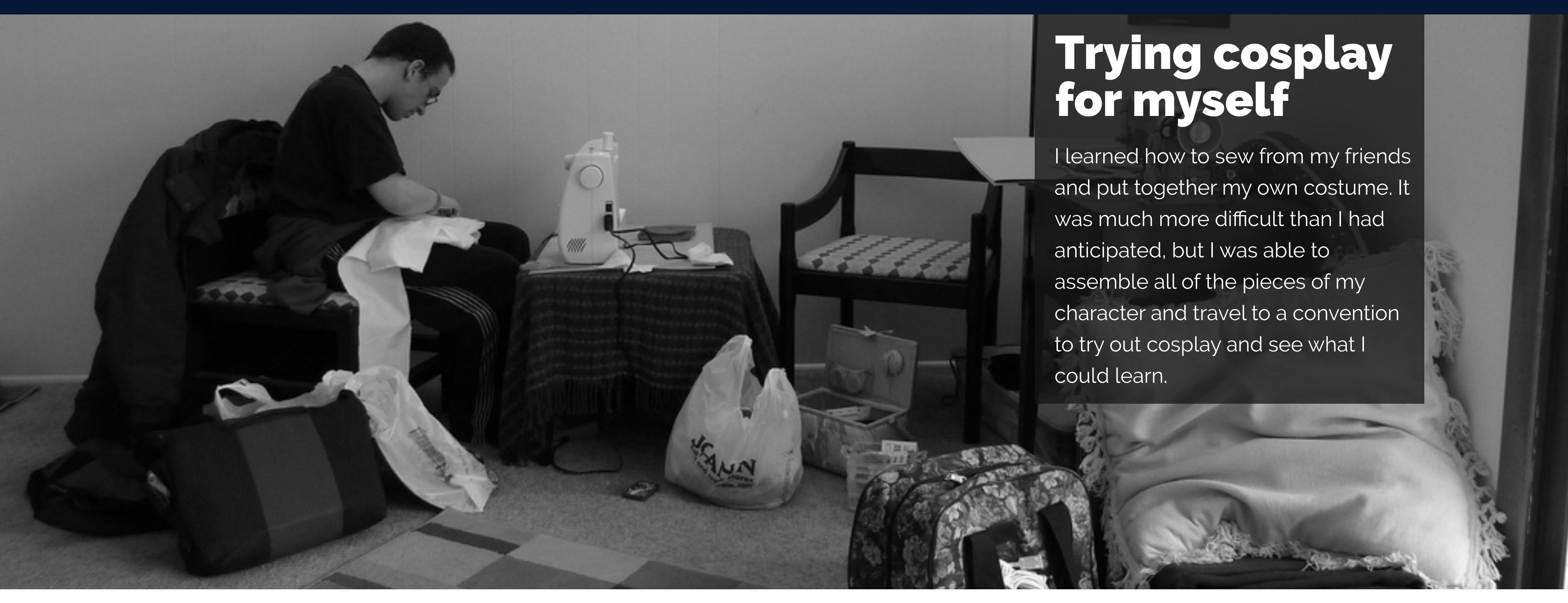


I also printed out photos of cosplayers and asked people to write their thoughts and comments. I learned that most comments were about the costume if they didn't know about the character.

I also led a focus group of people who go to conventions, asking them about their experiences there. I learned that they love to see cosplay and will take many pictures of cosplay. They said they will interact with characters they know and take pictures of well-done costumes, even if they didn't know the character.

"Everyone has a reason to cosplay - **whether it's to fit in or it's to break out** of their introversion. **When I wear a costume, I am much more social** and people just come to me. **It's a confidence booster** that makes me stay physically fit for 10 years."

This quote from one of my 5 interviews of cosplayers helped me learn why people cosplay and go to conventions in character. This gave me the inspiration to try this myself to learn more about cosplay and conventions.



Trying cosplay for myself

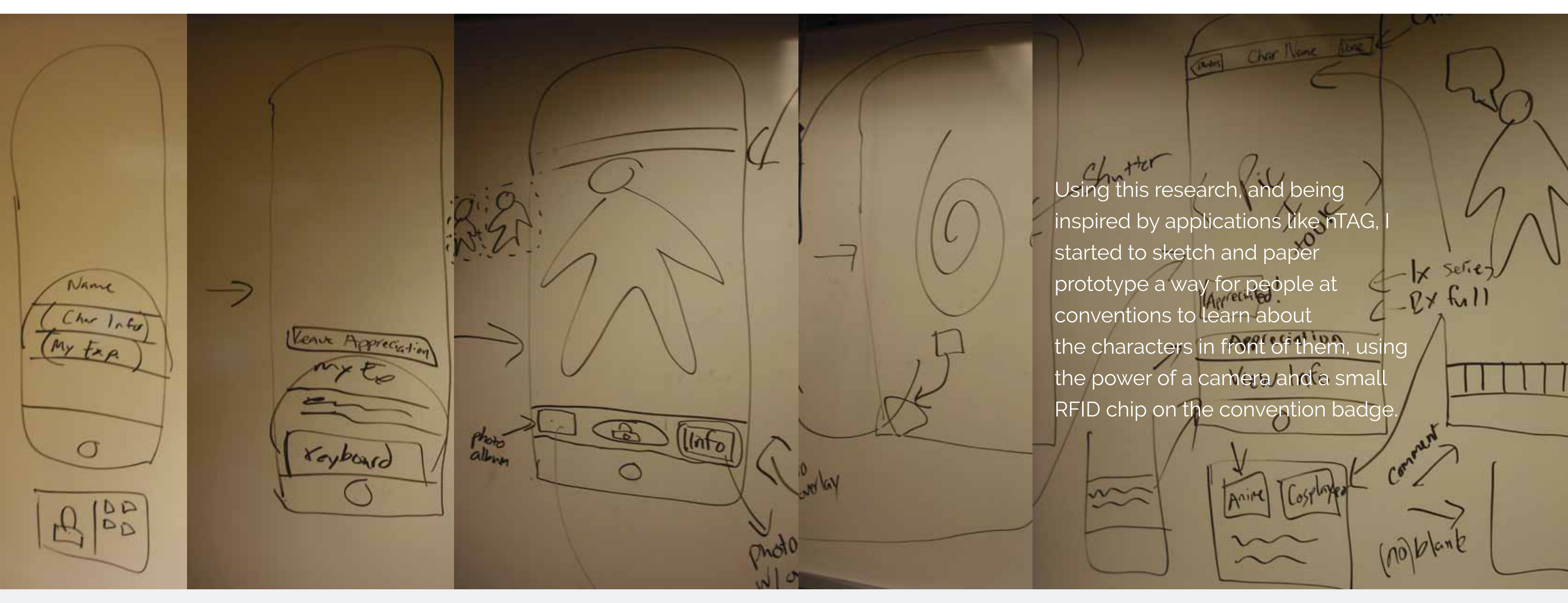
I learned how to sew from my friends and put together my own costume. It was much more difficult than I had anticipated, but I was able to assemble all of the pieces of my character and travel to a convention to try out cosplay and see what I could learn.

Conventions are large, busy spaces. I saw firsthand that I only interacted with characters I knew and was hesitant to engage with new people. I also saw most people at the convention carry cameras and it was commonplace to pull cosplayers away from what they were doing to ask for a picture.

When I cosplayed my character at the convention, I experienced firsthand the love people had of my character, I was asked for many pictures and received hugs and appreciation from complete strangers. I was even fortunate to get praise from fellow cosplayers who were from the same show my character was from.

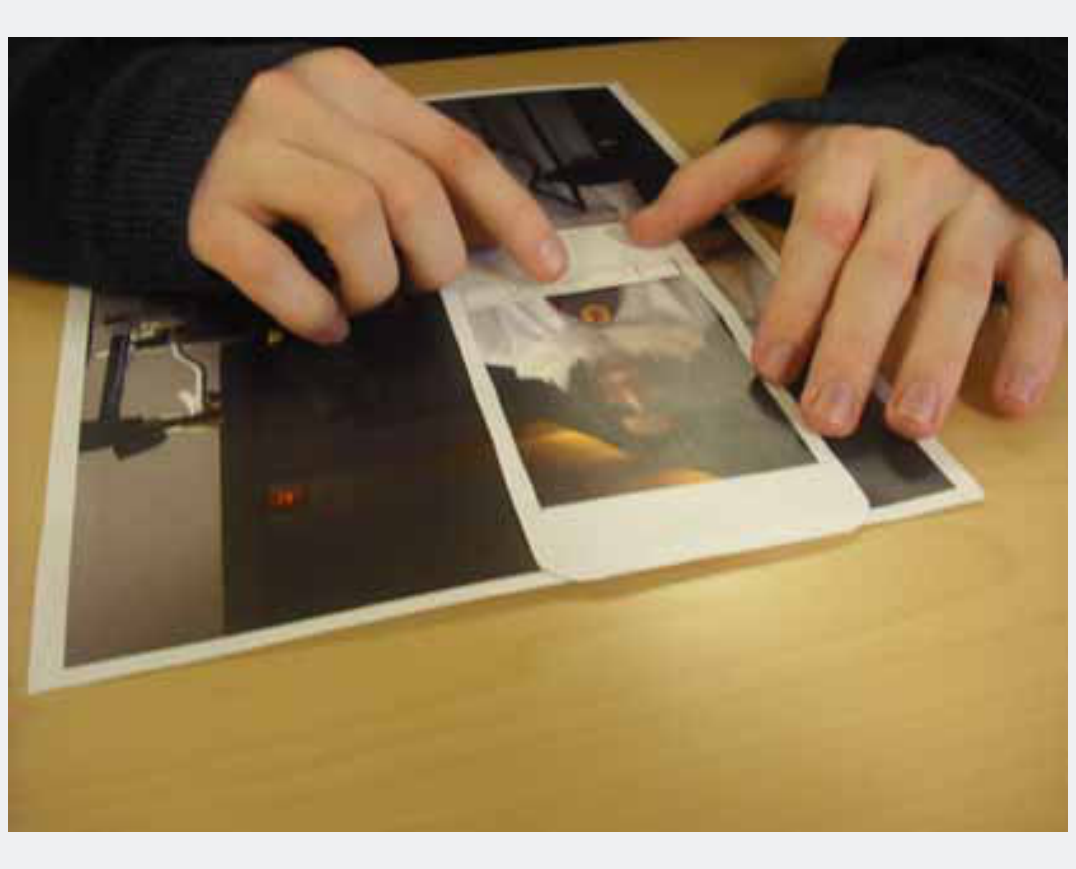
What Not to Wear:
Cosplay Edition
Jennifer Ash and Casey Addy
Genericon 2010

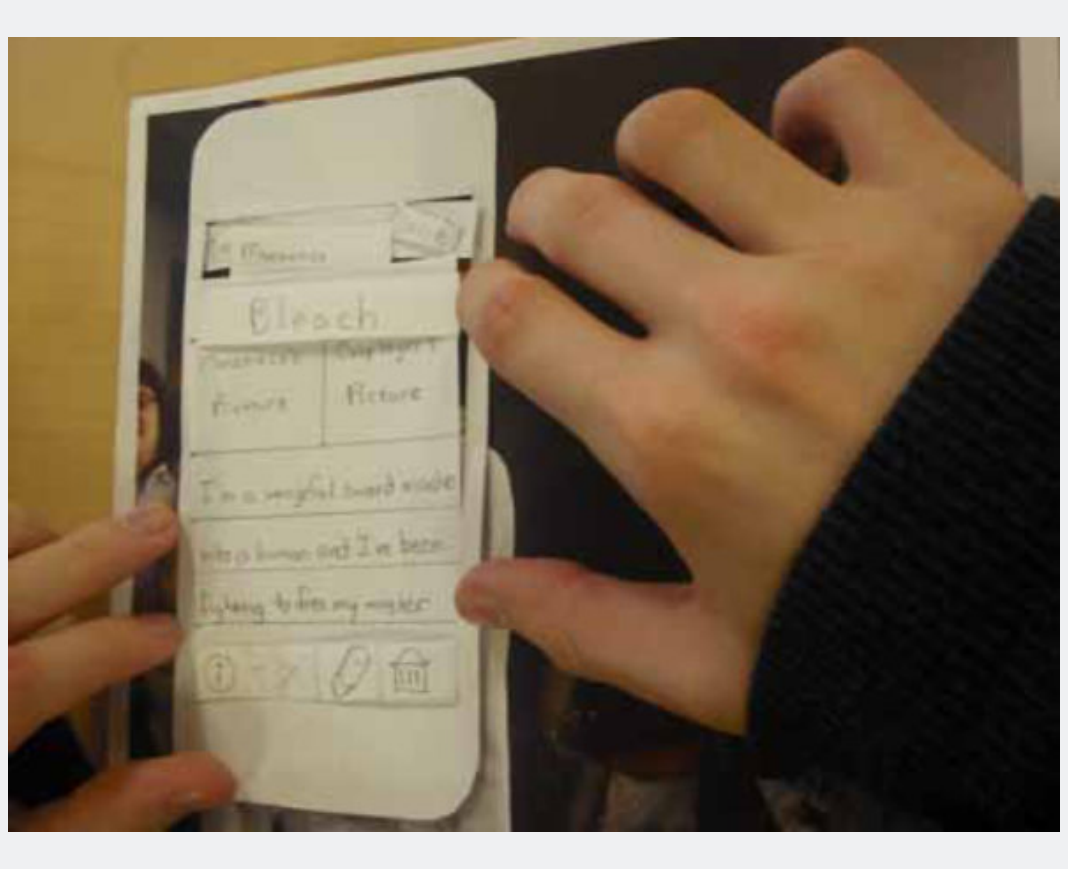
I also co-led a panel at the convention, discussing tips to consider when creating a cosplay. I was happy to share what I had learned in my experience, and to learn from the other attendees and cosplayers. The overall experience gave me an idea on how to address the initial problem: giving people an idea who a character was to bring people together.



Using this research, and being inspired by applications like nTAG, I started to sketch and paper prototype a way for people at conventions to learn about the characters in front of them, using the power of a camera and a small RFID chip on the convention badge.

Esther Blanchett





Usability testing

Testing the experience

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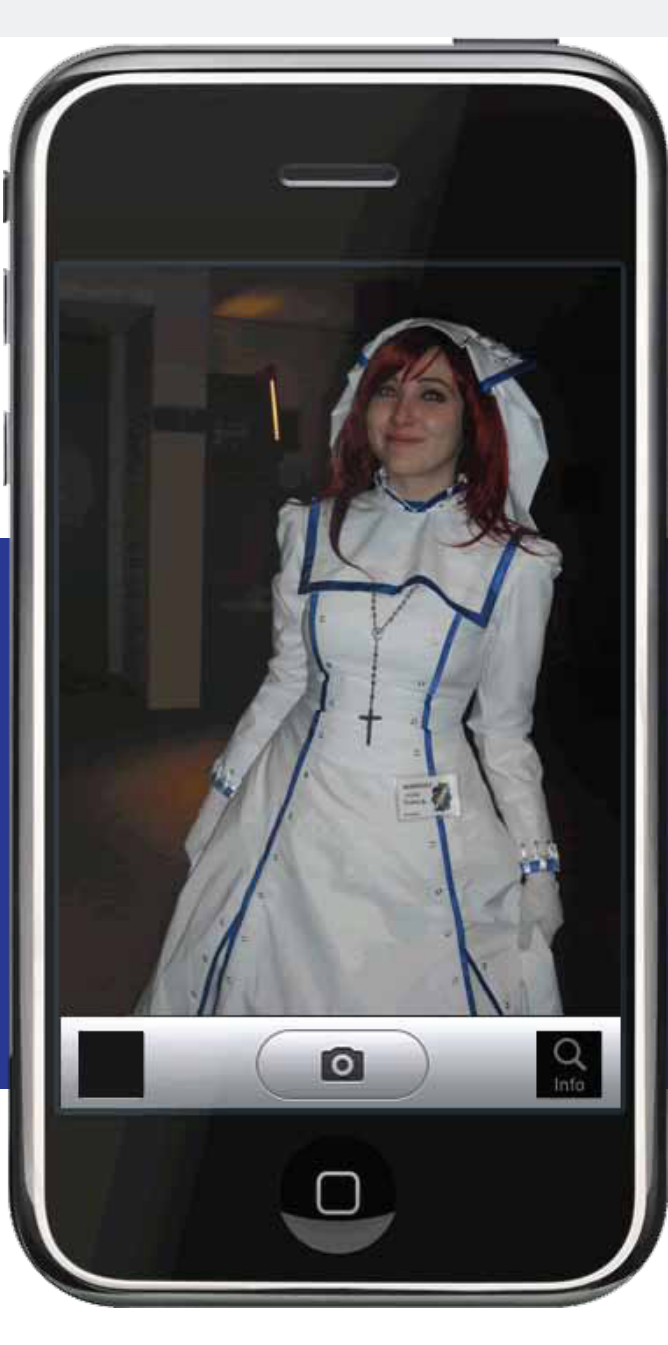

Cosplayer 1 Cosplayer 2 Cosplay group

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"**It would be handy to have this at a con because I don't know them all.** If you can use an iPhone, you can use this."

These are actual quotes from the usability testing sessions I ran on this design. Participants were excited to have a means to learn about the people around them at the convention, learn about new characters, and make new friends.