***User stories create MEANING & VALUE for a release***

***As we sat around and talked about the features for Assist 2 and tried to figure out what the clients really wanted, I found an article on an interesting approach – create a “user story” to define the feature. It would be great to work with our focus groups to create user stories and value!***

A user story is somewhat formal, in the sense that there may be guidelines to creating it, but it is also very informal compared to more rigid requirements documentation. How do you define a "user story," and what are some examples of good user stories and bad user stories?

The user story template is a way to learn the discipline that leads to the real goals of the form. The most important goal is to focus development on delivering VALUE. We improve our ROI on software development by delivering value more often. The form of the user story keeps us focused on value. Instead of working out why people want a feature, and whether it contributes to the value, now we're working out who needs a feature, then assigning the story. So our stories are much more focused.

\*Express what you want the system to do in terms of value - in terms of value to the business, value to a user, value to a customer. One story template puts the Value statement first:

**In order to** <achieve some value>
**As a** <role>
**I want** <some feature>

Here is an example:

* OK: Because it's what I expect, as the customer, I want the system to be stable.
* BETTER: Because my employees work at all hours in multiple time zones around the world, as a customer, I want the system to be stable. (Details about how to measure stability--like up time to four nines--goes in acceptance criteria.)
* BAD: To please customers, as the business, I want the system to be stable.

\* Get clear on who or what benefits from the functionality. The term "user story" is probably misleading, because the "user" of the user story isn't necessarily an end-user. It might be the business, a purchaser, or a partner. I usually guide teams and product owners to spend time determining who all the users, actors, and beneficiaries of the system are. This goal of getting really clear on the beneficiaries and value of functionality also leads me sometimes to write multi-part stories for the same slice of functionality. For example, the following statements are for the same story:

* As a partner, I want the system to suggest where users can buy products in search results, to drive traffic to my retail site.
* As a consumer, I want the system to suggest where I can buy products in search results, because I want to quickly find online retailers that sell what I'm looking for.

Create full descriptions of the users, complete with pictures, motivations, characteristics. Spend time explaining the whys for functionality. Remember, users don't sit down to use Word; they sit down to write a letter. Help your team understand the goals of your actors, users, customers. Use pictures; tell stories. In order for our work to have any meaning, as a developer, tester or writer, I want to know why you want it.

When we want to work out what goes in a release, it's easy. The word 'release' is more meaningful. There's some untapped money out there - some market share, some cost saving, some battle against a competitor. All the features we produce go towards releasing that value for our customers to use - and it's the *value* we're releasing, not the features.

\*\* Compiled from a blog written by Elizabeth Keogh and the article “User Stories with Ronica Roth” by Joey McAllister. \*\*