Solace

Junior UX Designer

Work Term #1

Fall 2021

Reflective Report

December 5, 2021

Solace: a comfort in times of sorrow. Solace, a company based in Ottawa that focuses on middleware and data management, centralizes its mission in offering businesses comfort in the complex modern times. By taking on the responsibilities of enabling the smart movement of data, and therefore offering clients better control over their data, Solace allows their clients to focus and thrive in what they do best: innovating. Like how shoppers can track the movement of their packages with a click of a button, Solace's event-driven technology manages real time data, allowing its users to receive and send information instantly; thereby keeping users updated on the latest events. During my four-month co-op work term, I was given the opportunity to work for Solace's UX team as a Junior UX Designer. Part of what the UX team does is make the experience of navigating and interacting with Solace's PubSub+ application easier and more enjoyable for its users. Though, initially, part of me felt anxious about my abilities to fulfill my role as a UX designer, due to not having any previous co-op experience, I have come to learn a lot about the UX industry and have developed many technical skills and competencies along the way.

Throughout my time at Solace, I have worked on various tasks and projects including reworking the flow of an existing feature, creating and modifying icons, and defining patterns to help build a design foundation for the UX team; through each of these experiences I was able to gain a new skill. On my first project of reworking the flow of an existing feature, one of the skills I gained was how to problem solve. Looking at the original design of a feature, I was challenged to solve the problem of redesigning the application to not only better fit users' needs and ease of usability, but also to fit the general aesthetic of Solace's application. Overcoming the challenge by iterating the flow of the application in various ways and drawing unique solutions based on

the consideration of users' needs and usability, for example my solution of placing items in an expandable list to categorize selections and make features more approachable by reducing visual clutter, I was able to develop my problem-solving skills to introduce new ways of improving existing features. In addition, having gone through the project from an iteration phase to a final release phase, I was able to experience the UX design process in a professional setting. This not only allowed me to gain the skill of following a design process to complete each step of a project, but it also allowed me to accomplish my learning objectives of familiarizing myself with the UX design process in general.

The second project I worked on was creating and modifying icons; through this project, I gained the skill of visual communication. Tasked with unifying Solace's system icons, I was challenged to modify and create icons to visually communicate the icons' use, as well as the company's persona. Analyzing how different shapes can be interpreted to reflect distinctive characteristics, I use this knowledge to visually represent what I believed to reflect a playful yet professional attitude: a shape with straight edges and rounded corners. Additionally, unhappy with some of the existing icons, I was able to explore new metaphors to visually represent the icons' uses, for example, glasses to show visibility, or a closed eyelid to show invisibility. To add, through the process of creating pixel perfect icons, I gained new technical skills in using Illustrator's merge and compound path features, as well as Figma's Boolean and component functions.

Lastly, for my third project, I focused on defining design patterns for different UI components. During the process of defining Solace's design patterns, I learned the skill of researching UX design rules, common practices, and other studies to properly inform the

decisions I made regarding the components' styles, usages, and behaviours. For example, I examined Norman Nielsen's guides on displaying hidden items to determine the best timing and behaviours for tooltip. Likewise, I often referenced Google's Material Design guidelines on icons to better understand styling rules when creating Solace's system icons. Furthermore, by creating design specifications for each component, I further enhanced my skill of visual communication as I created visual flows to communicate design details to the UX team, as well as developers.

In addition to the projects mentioned above, I also had certain responsibilities I was expected to uphold including participating in team discussions and completing my tasks in a timely matter. Through the various projects and responsibilities I was given, I was able to complete certain accomplishments including: creating mock-ups and specs for UX designs by using Figma to clearly iterate ideations that can be shared and discussed by my team, practiced time management by planning everyday tasks and organizing team meetings to ensure that my projects proceeded in a timely matter, and demonstrated flexibility in coordinating and collaborating with team members by adjusting schedules and communication styles in adaptation of varying time zones. Additionally, both the projects and responsibilities gave me the opportunity to fulfill my learning objectives of familiarizing myself with Figma, gaining the courage to participate in professional team discussions, and experiencing the UX design process as previously mentioned. Thanks to the opportunities of creating mock-ups, specs, and icons in Figma, I was able to familiarize myself with the Figma application to become more proficient and efficient with my work. Likewise, having team meetings and discussions for different design projects allowed me to gradually develop the courage to participate in professional team discussions, voicing my creative input to help enhance projects. Thanks to the varying projects

and team atmosphere Solace provided, I was able to accomplish my learning objectives whilst also gaining other valuable skills simultaneously.

Despite having no previous co-op experience, I believe I was selected for the position of a Junior UX Designer for two main reasons, the first being my technical skills. Having had the experience of creating my own applications and websites for school projects, I had prior experience using applications like Figma to practice UX designing, prototyping, and iterating ideations. This experience, I believe, allowed me to fulfill the basic skillsets the UX team were seeking in a Junior UX Designer. Secondly, and most importantly, I believe my ability to communicate and collaborate with others showcased a key skill needed for the UX Designer position. Having worked on a multitude of team projects for school, as well as being a lifeguard that depends on communication and collaboration to ensure the safety of the pool and its patrons, I can say that communication and teamwork in the UX team was just as important as all my previous experiences. Like in school projects and in lifeguarding, having good communication skills and teamwork is crucial for such a collaborative discipline such as UX design. As a designer, decisions are often made as a team and discussions are essential for creating the most user-friendly designs. Likewise, communicating designs and concepts amongst other teams is equally important as it ensures designs are implemented correctly after they have been developed. For these reasons, I believe I was selected to be a part of Solace's team thanks to my basic skills in UX design and using design software, as well as my experience in working in environments that helped develop my communication and collaboration skills.

Aside from the technical skills and competencies I have gained throughout my experience at Solace, the one aspect that has impacted me the most was the community and support I felt

during my time there. With, not only, the UX team, but also all the other Solace teams being supportive, patient, and inclusive, I was able to confidently grow and develop as a designer. As my team helped teach and guide me through the design processes, I felt encouraged and supported to explore and venture on my own, finding my personal approach to design and learning from the mistakes I had made along the way. Thanks to the teams support and encouragement, I started to feel more confident in myself as a designer. In the end, my experience working for Solace was filled with learning opportunities, allowing me to, not only, learn and enhance my technical skills with Figma and Illustrator, but also my soft skills of collaborating and communicating, problem solving, researching, and project managing. As a result, though initially anxious of how my experience would unfold at Solace, my experience at the company was greater than I could have ever imagined, and I am thankful for all that my team has taught me.