CASE STUDY · RAKUTEN KOBO · 2019

Ideation, workshops & brainstorming

How the Global Ads Platform and Kobo Writing Life went from an open brief to mapped journeys, tested ideas and a plan for 2020.

Product Designer (Contract): Solida Sar

COVERED SECTIONS

1. Global Ads brief
2. Information architecture
3. Workshop session
4. Journey flow & “How might we”
5. Wireframes & iterations
6. Onboarding flow
7. Ad placement concepts
8. Kobo Writing Life PO Week
9. User story maps
10. Technical SEO audit

Why build an ad platform?

BUSINESS STATEMENT

The digital-ad market is massive, growing and diversifying. Authors and publishers have marketing budgets and want to grow their sales on Kobo.com. GAP lets Kobo capitalize on this: a new revenue stream, and a new way for customers to discover books.

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

An ad-buying platform for independent authors and publishing houses will:

- create a new revenue source
- help increase publisher sales
- improve discoverability

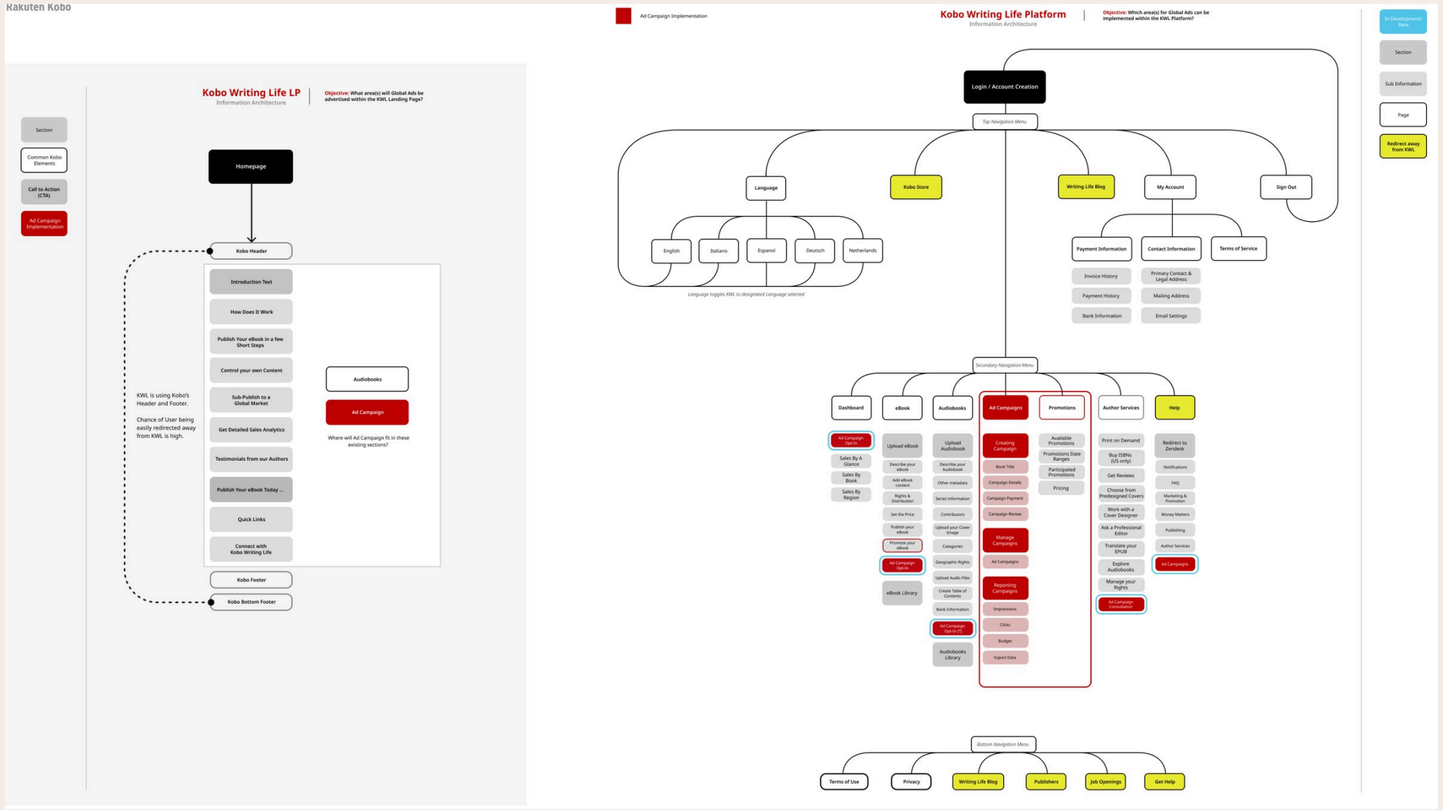
GAP goal

A selling system with inventory management and a proper auction, usable across all Rakuten use cases.

Kobo goal

KWL authors buy ad space in the Kobo Store through a simple interface, then monitor their ads and overall investment.

Where could ads live in Kobo Writing Life?



KWL landing page

Which sections could advertise Global Ads? KWL uses Kobo's header and footer, so authors can easily be redirected away.

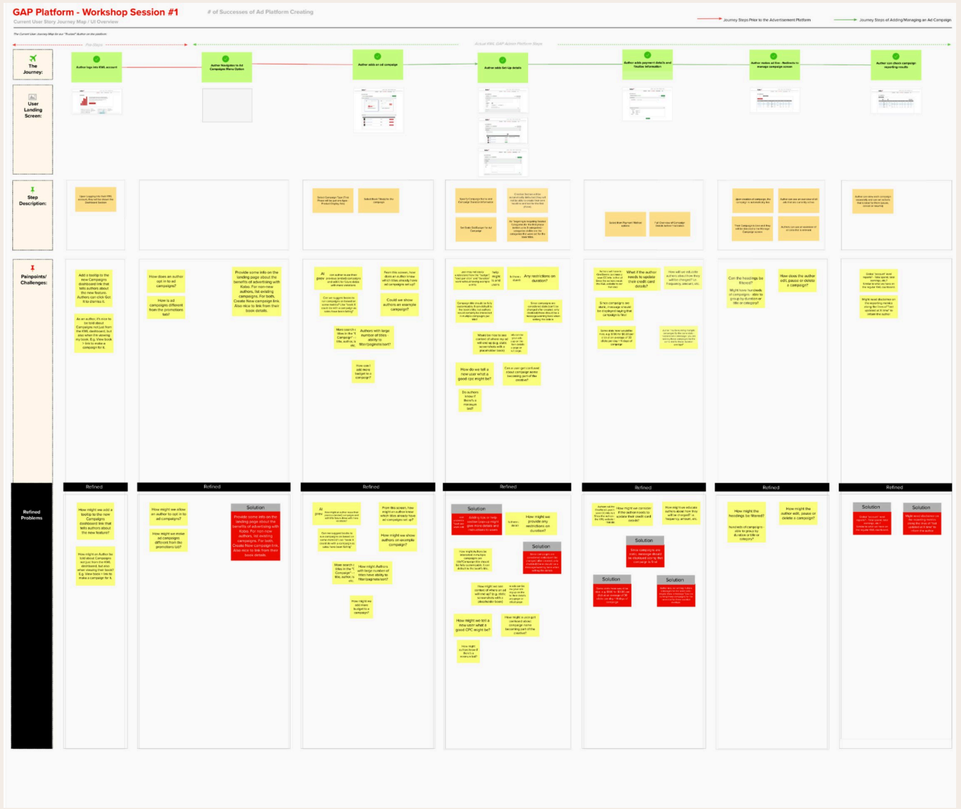
KWL platform

Which areas could hold Global Ads? An Ad Campaigns section for creating, managing and reporting, plus opt-ins from Dashboard, eBooks, Audiobooks, Author Services and Help.

Red boxes mark the proposed Ad Campaign areas.

03 · WORKSHOP SESSION #1

Mapping the author’s journey together



WORKSHOP AGENDA

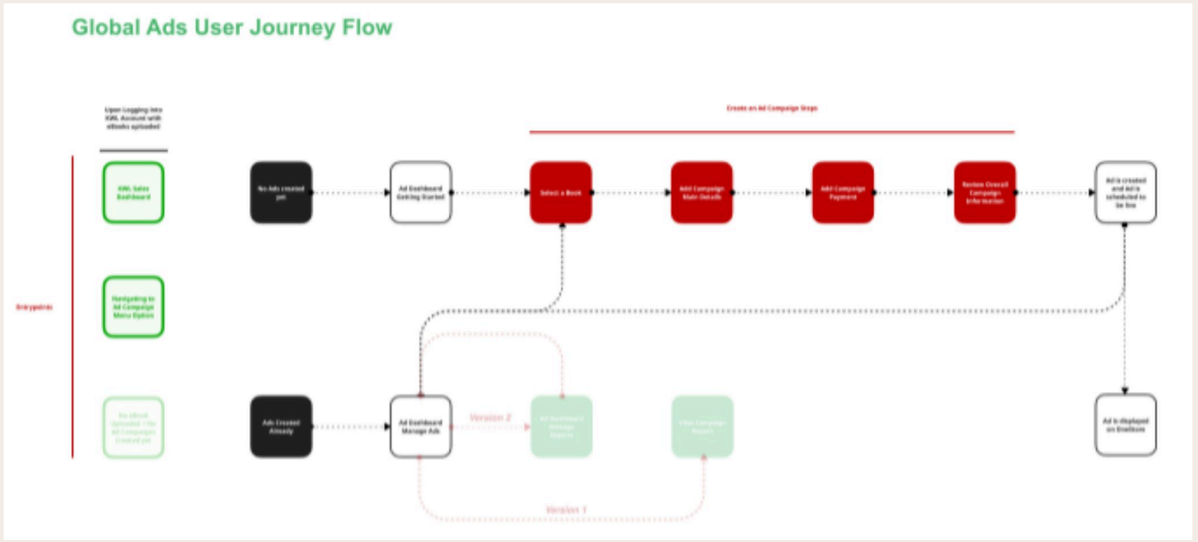
1. Introduction: workshop objective
2. GAP introduction and business objective
3. User journey map walkthrough
4. Participant activity session
5. Participant explanation and grouping
6. Dot voting session (dropped)
7. Dot voting results (dropped)
8. Q&A and summary

Business goal: generate more book sales and build KWL author awareness, with a CPC platform that helps authors reach their target audience.

The board runs from journey steps to landing screens, step descriptions, pain points, then refined problems and solutions.

04 · JOURNEY FLOW

Global Ads user journey flow



Entry points

After logging in to KWL: the sales dashboard or the Ad Campaign menu option.

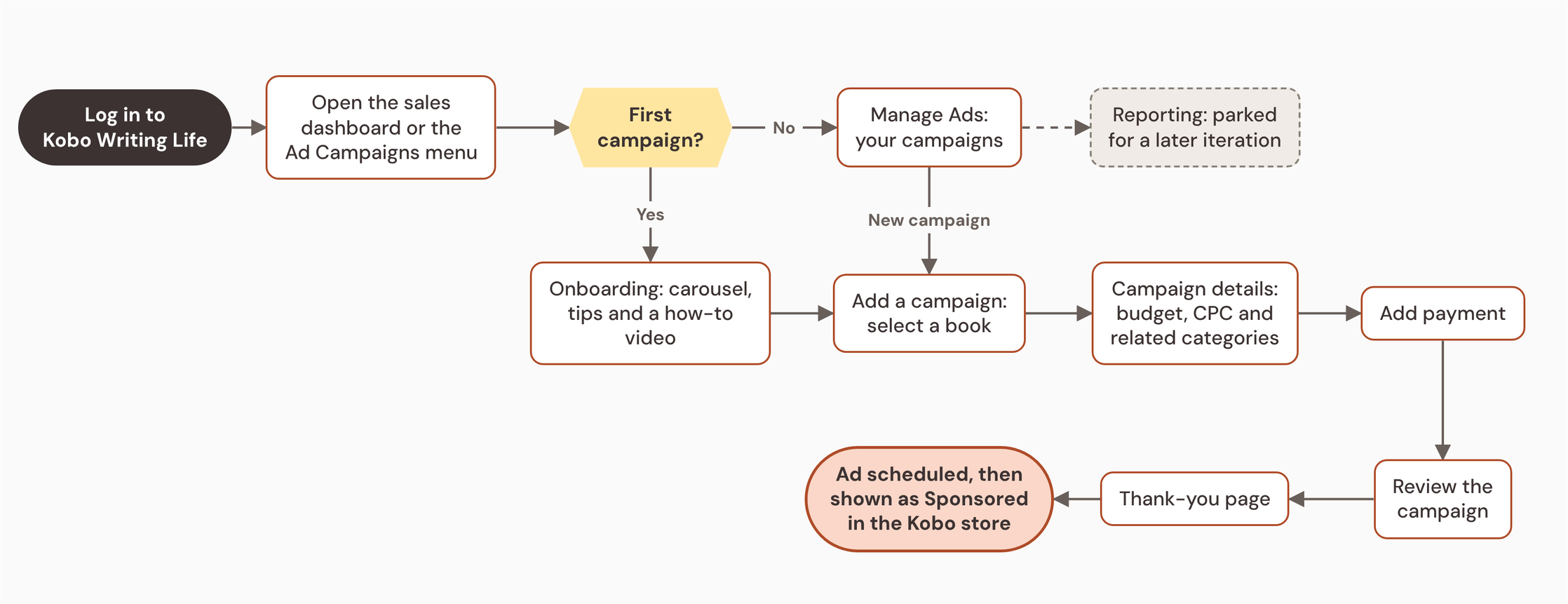
Create an ad campaign

Select a book, add main details, add payment, review. The ad is then scheduled to go live and shown on OneStore.

Returning authors

Land on Manage Ads. Two versions explored how reporting connects.

How an author gets an ad live



How might we...

...let authors know when a campaign is ending, or their budget has been reached?

...create icons or illustrations that guide authors through ad creation?

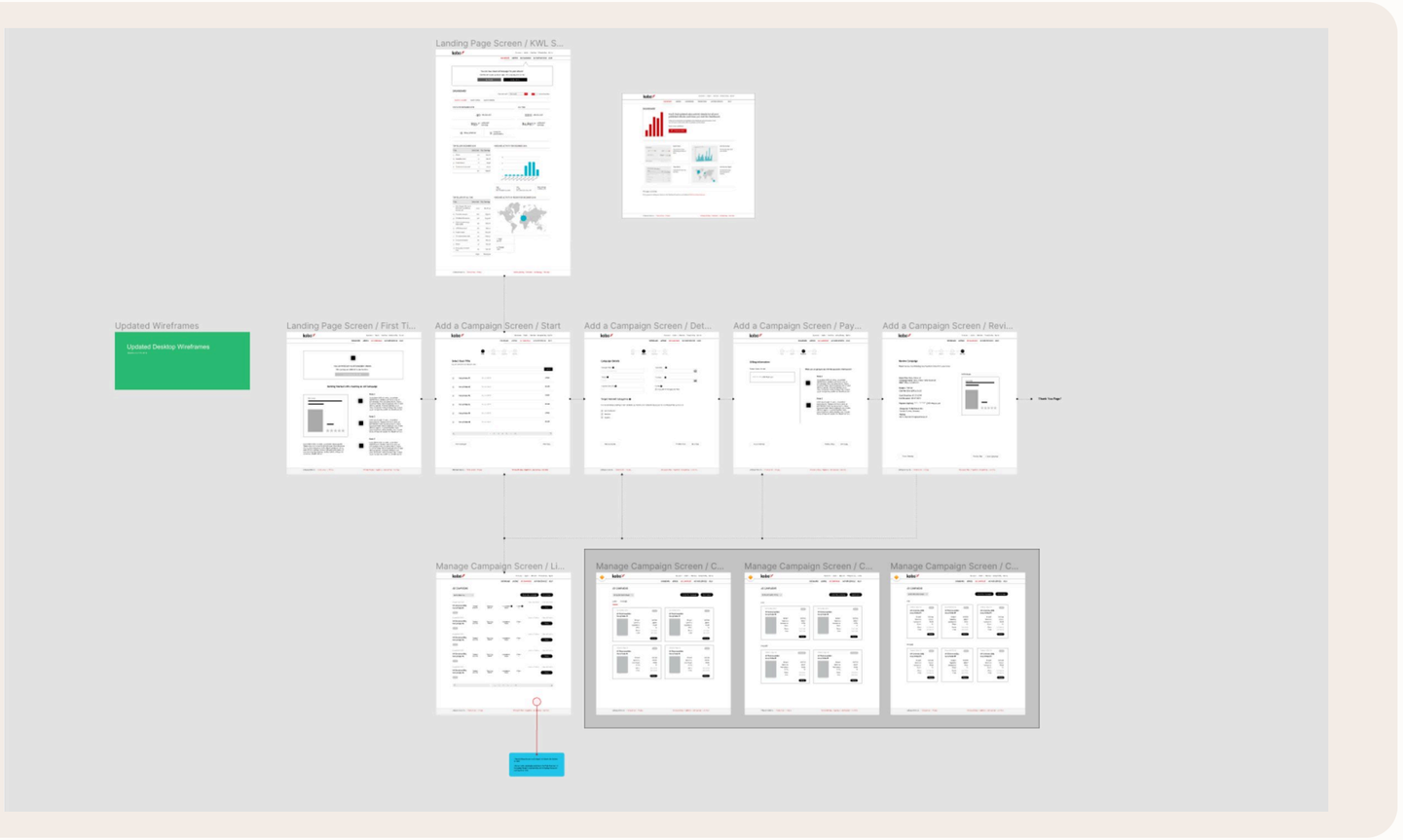
...discover new entry points to Ad Campaigns?

...reuse the credit-card payment flow from Kobo.com?

...give tips for an effective campaign: the best budget, the best bid?

...make the whole process feel more positive and personal?

Updated desktop wireframes



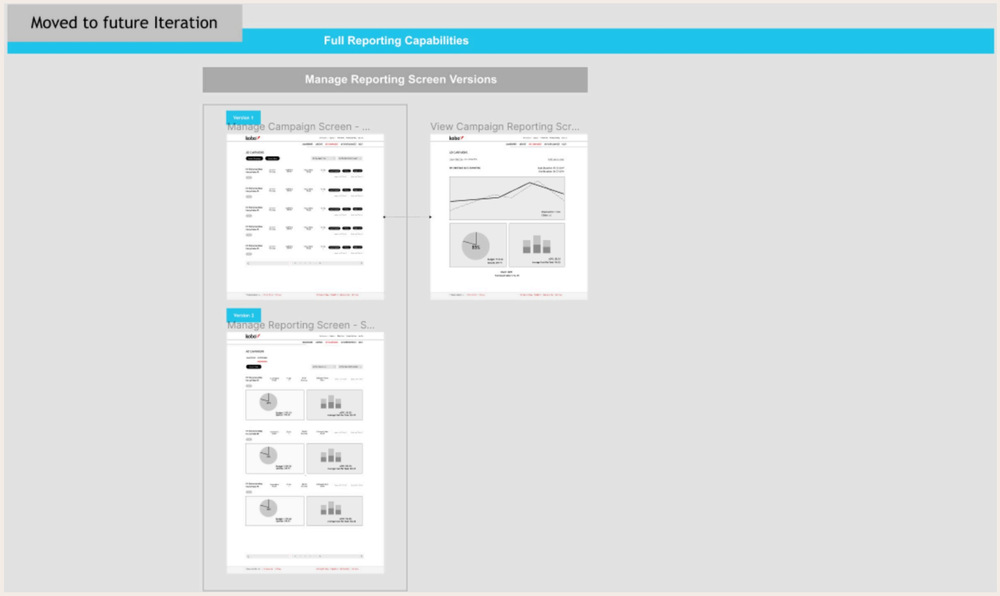
THE FLOW

1. Landing page: first-time and returning views
2. Add a campaign: select a book
3. Campaign details
4. Payment
5. Review, then a thank-you page

MANAGE CAMPAIGNS

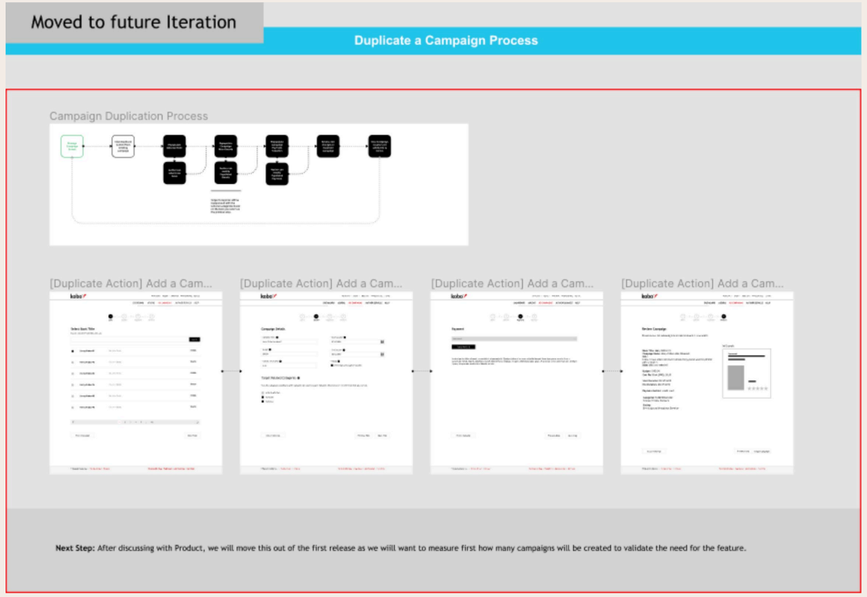
A list view, plus three card-based layouts explored side by side.

Parked for a future iteration



Full reporting capabilities

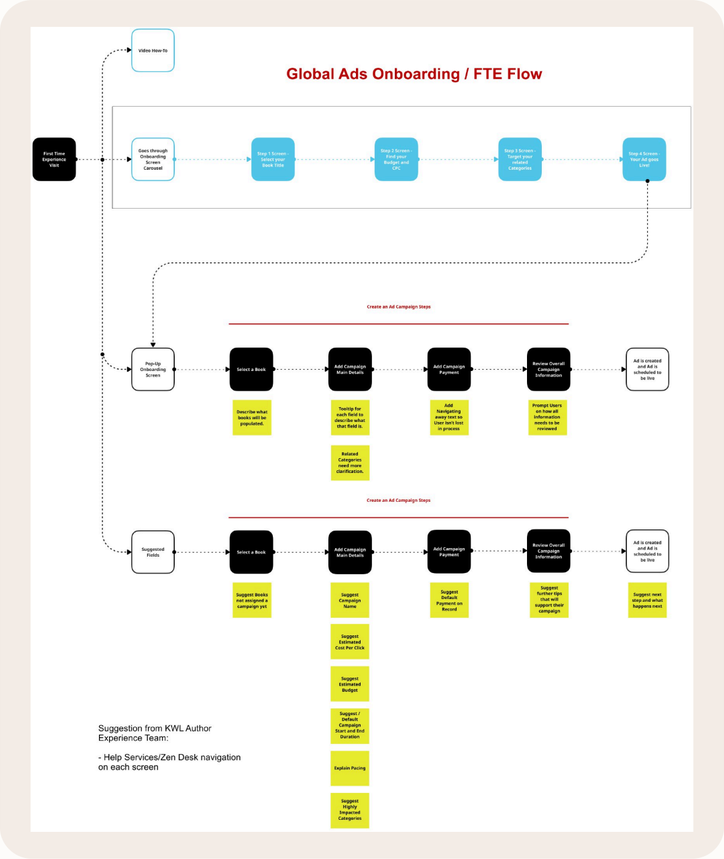
Two versions of the Manage Reporting screen, with charts for budget, clicks and cost per click.



Duplicate a campaign

With Product, we moved this out of the first release: first measure how many campaigns get created, to validate the need.

Three ways to onboard a first-time author



1. Onboarding carousel

Four screens on the first visit: select your book, find your budget and CPC, target related categories, your ad goes live. Plus a how-to video.

2. Pop-up guidance on each step

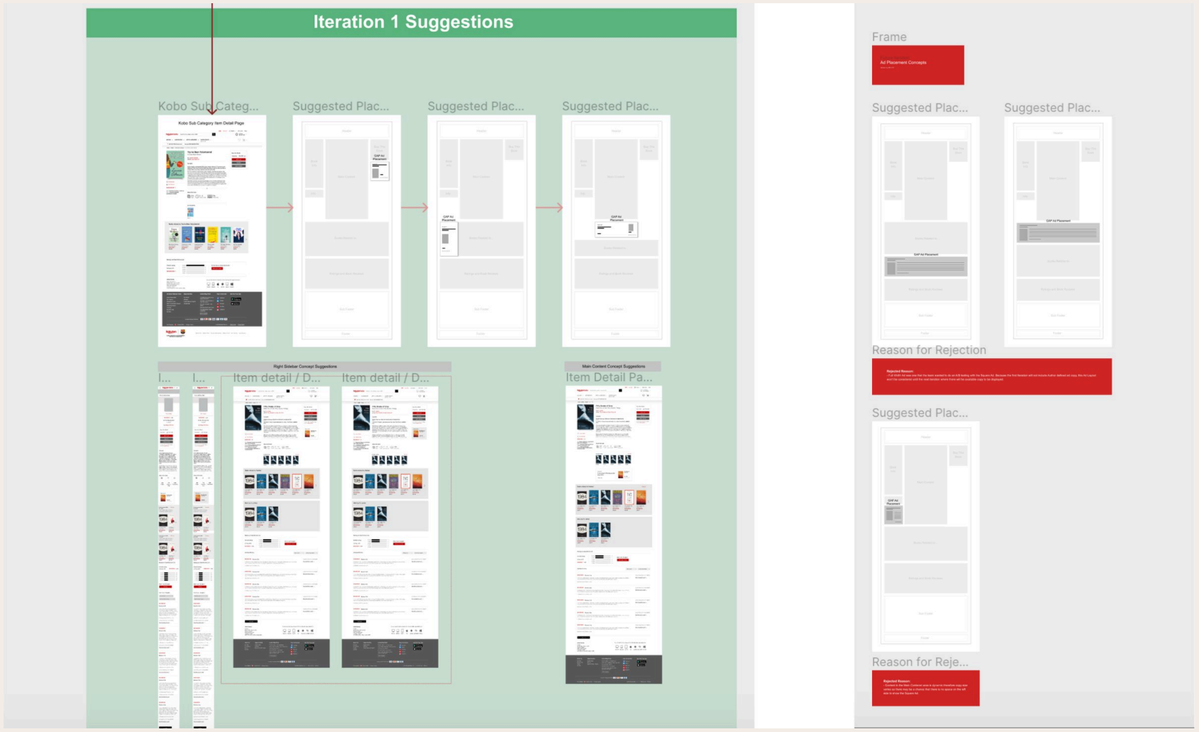
Explain which books appear, add a tooltip for every field, clarify related categories, warn before leaving so work isn't lost, and prompt a final review.

3. Suggested fields

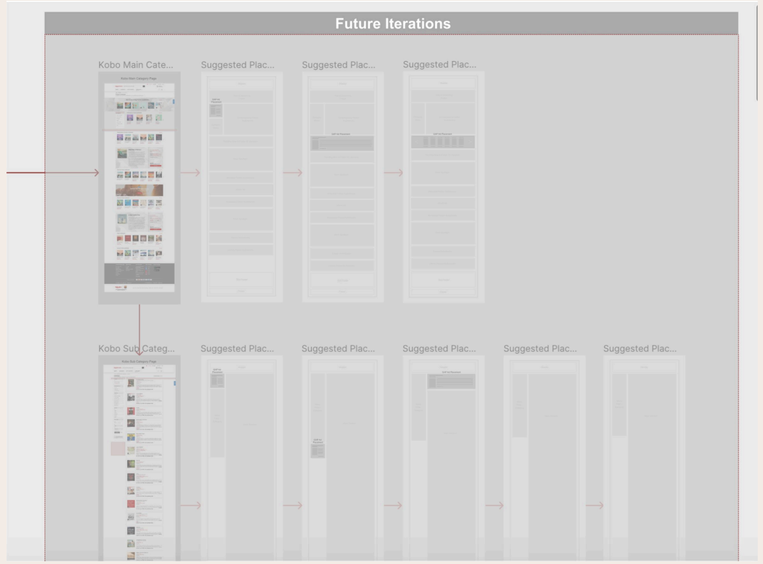
Pre-fill what we can: books without a campaign, a campaign name, estimated CPC and budget, default dates, high-impact categories, the payment on record, and what happens next.

From the KWL Author Experience team: link to Help (Zendesk) from every screen.

Exploring where ads appear

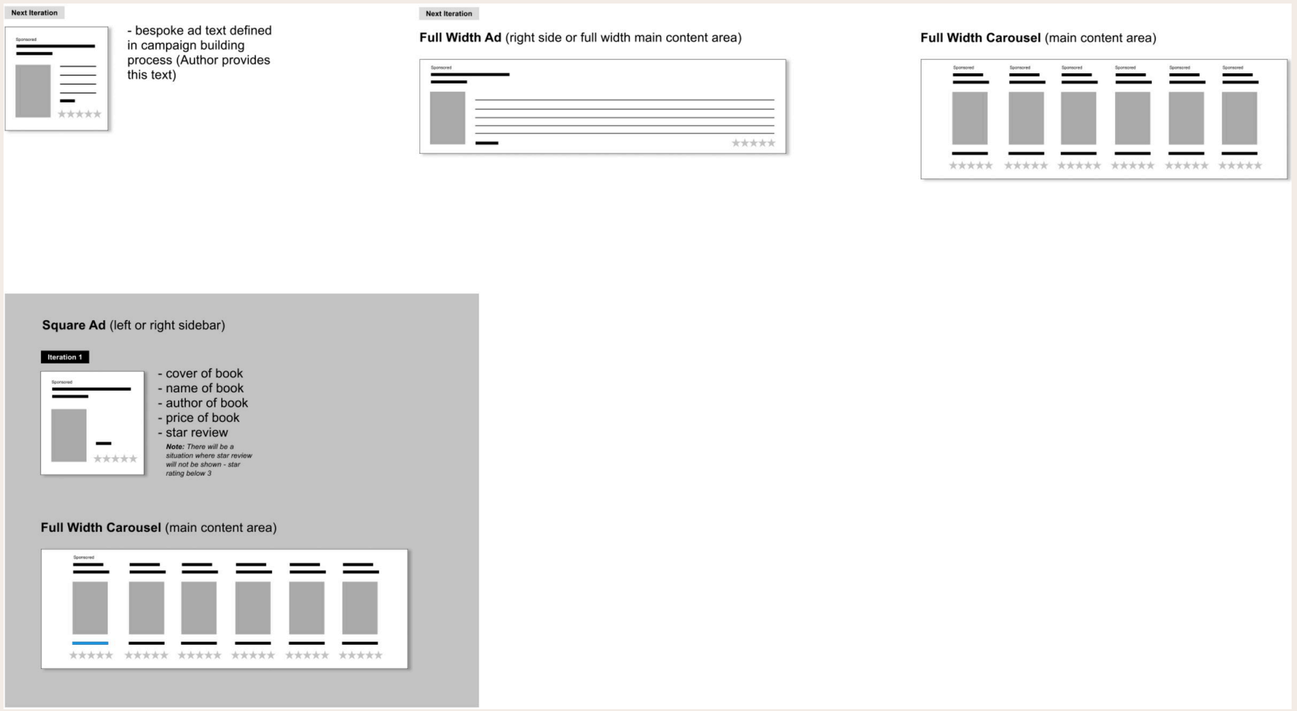


Iteration 1: suggested placements on the item detail page. Rejected concepts stay on the board, each with its reason.



Future iterations: placements on main and sub-category pages.

What goes inside an ad



ITERATION 1

Square ad in the left or right sidebar: cover, title, author, price and star rating.

Stars are hidden when a book's rating is below 3.

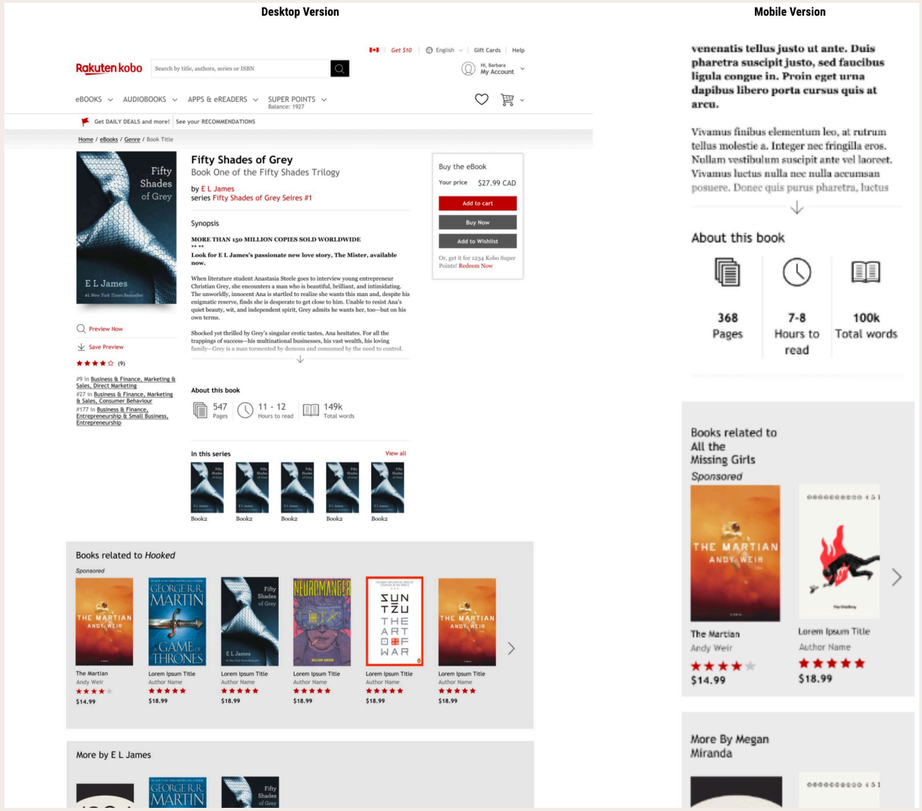
Full-width carousel in the main content area.

NEXT ITERATION

Bespoke ad text the author writes while building the campaign, and a **full-width ad**.

07 · HIGH FIDELITY

The sponsored carousel, in the store



A “Books related to…” carousel, labelled Sponsored, on the item detail page.

- Designed for desktop and mobile.
- Each ad shows the cover, title, author, star rating and price.
- Sits in the main content area, below the book’s own details.

08 · KOBO WRITING LIFE · PO WEEK 2019

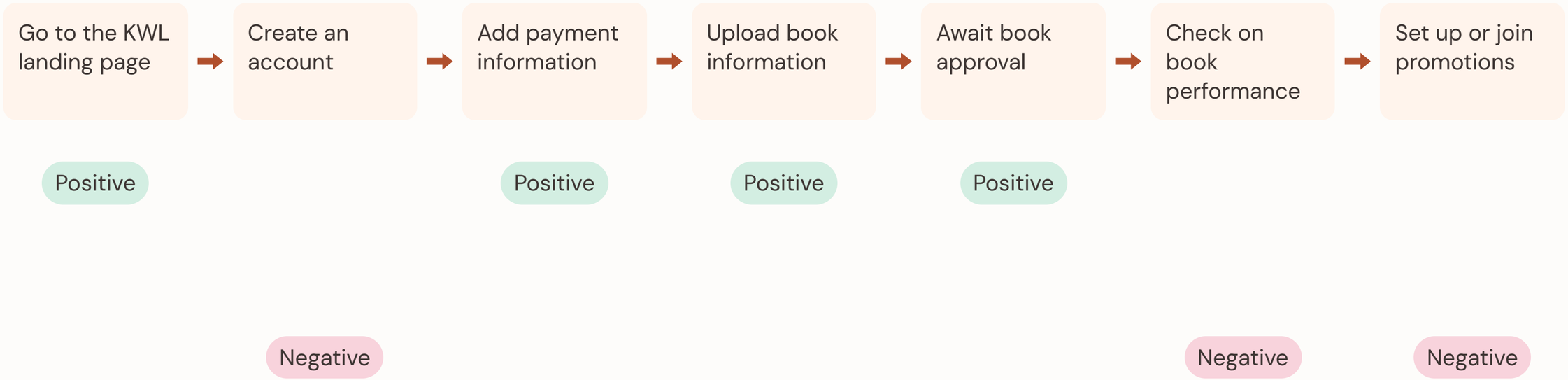
A UX foundation in two and a half days

Kobo Writing Life had no UX foundation yet. With my Product Owner, I built the first one, then presented it to executives, product owners and designers.

User journey map | Service blueprint | Proto personas | KPI dashboard | A/B tests & key problems

“I want to upload my book easily so I can start selling it.”

Author job · the seven steps, and how the author feels at each one



Checking performance and promoting repeat in a loop once a book is live.

Five stages of an author’s life on KWL



Publishing itself works. The friction sits before it, in finding KWL and signing up, and after it, in promoting a book.

Who publishes on KWL

S

Stacy

FIRST-TIME AUTHOR

- Publishing for the first time
- “Green” on how to promote her book

J

Jane

FULL-TIME AUTHOR

- Has published multiple books
- Regularly promotes her books
- Tracks how her books perform

P

Pooh Bear Publishing

INDIE PUBLISHER

- Manages multiple authors
- Regularly promotes their authors’ books
- Tracks book performance
- Needs to manage large numbers of books easily

Top KPIs: where KWL stood in 2019

NPS

16.82

in 2019, up from 9.38 in 2018

Top asks, scores under 7: marketing and promotional opportunities, a better book creation workflow, more book sales.

Top asks, overall: dashboard improvements, marketing and promotional opportunities, a better book creation workflow.

SALES

~26%

of English eBook sales (~6% of non-English)

- 102,915 authors, 53,004 active
- 3,655 added in Q2, 1,759 of them active
- $3,935,474 net sales in Q2
- Year-to-date up 2.78% on last year
- Audio: still an open question

PROMOTIONS

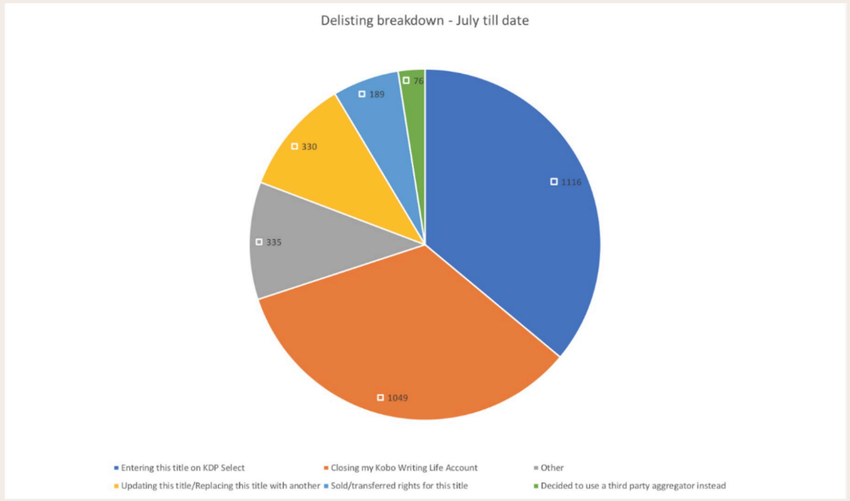
$9,873

in Q2

Year-to-date down 48.57% on last year, after the terms changed in Q4 2018.

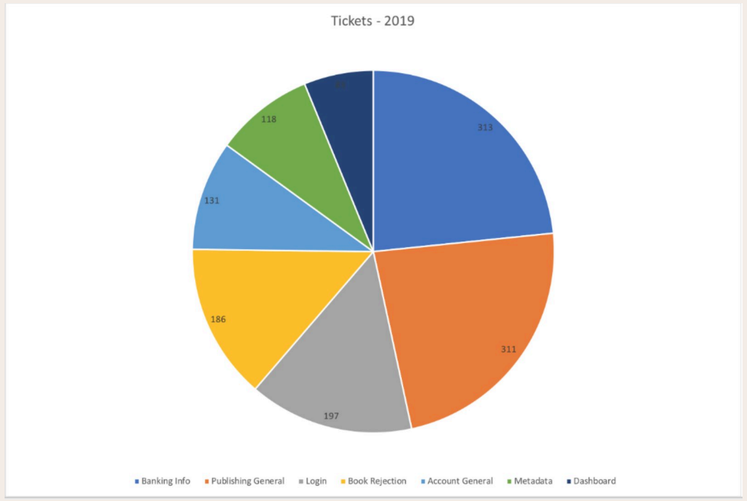
Still unknown: how many authors actively use promotions, and how many sales they drive.

Why authors leave, and where they get stuck



Delisted titles, July to date

Top reasons: entering the title in KDP Select (1,116) and closing the KWL account (1,049).



Support tickets, 2019

Banking info (313) and general publishing questions (311) lead, then login (197) and book rejection (186).

What to test, and what to solve in 2020

A/B tests

- A simpler account creation flow with fewer steps. Does it improve the author funnel?
- Email reminders about unfinished eBook drafts. Do fewer drafts go unpublished?

Mini polls

- How many Kobo Insiders know about KWL, and does self-publishing with Kobo interest them?
- How satisfied are authors with the sales dashboard: what they like, what to improve, what they want next?

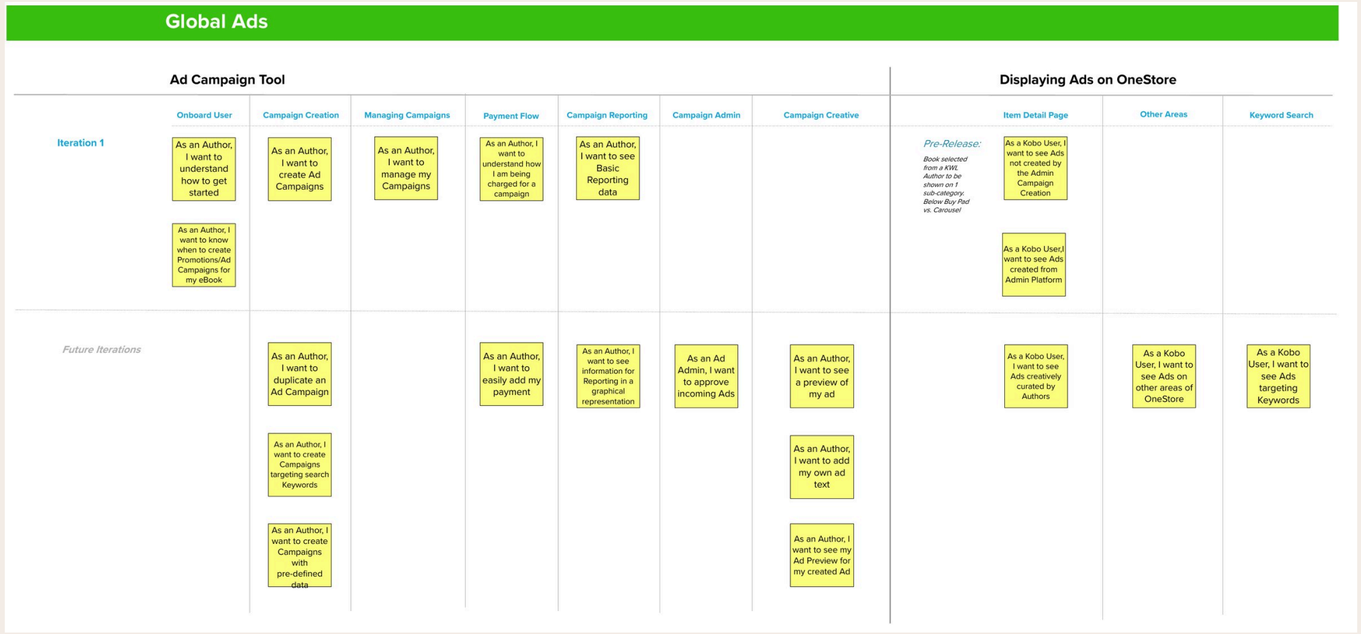
Key problems for 2020

How might we make sure authors don’t get stuck creating an account?

How might we keep authors from choosing third-party aggregators instead?

09 · USER STORY MAP

Global Ads: iteration 1 vs. later

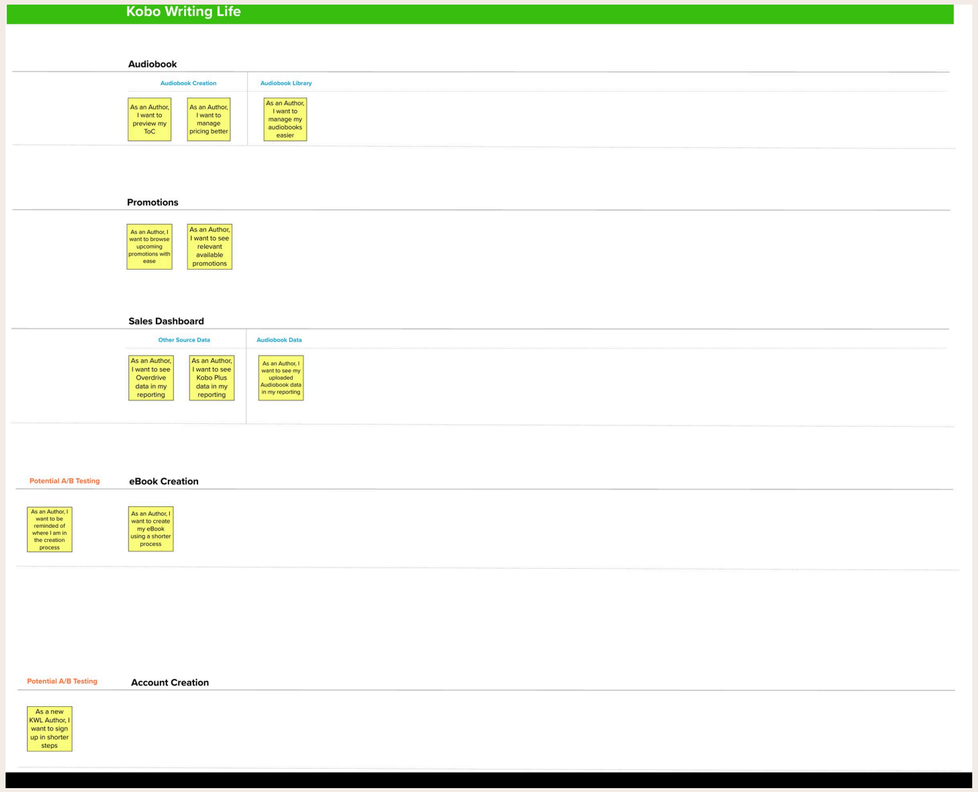


Ad Campaign Tool: onboarding, campaign creation, managing campaigns, payment, reporting, admin and creative.

Displaying ads on OneStore: the item detail page first, then other store areas and keyword search.

09 · USER STORY MAP

Kobo Writing Life stories



Audiobooks

Preview the table of contents, manage pricing better, manage audiobooks more easily.

Promotions

Browse upcoming promotions with ease, and see the relevant ones that are available.

Sales dashboard

See OverDrive, Kobo Plus and audiobook data in reporting.

Potential A/B tests

A shorter eBook creation process with reminders of where you left off, and a shorter sign-up.

Bringing KWL under one domain

Kobo's Director of Growth and Acquisition asked me to help propose a KWL redesign with every area under one domain.

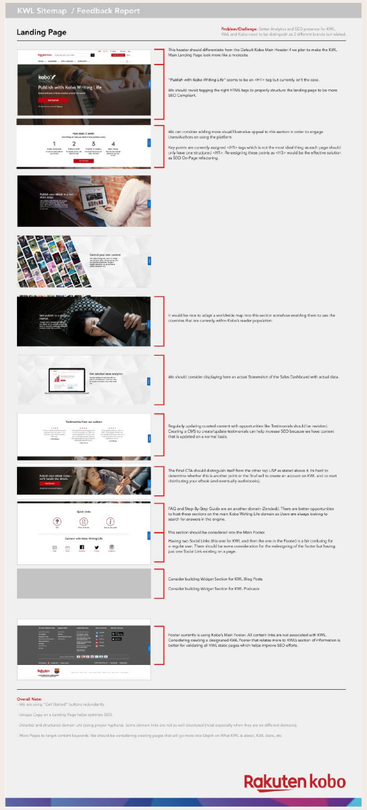
Along the way I flagged the on-page SEO issues holding back organic ranking.

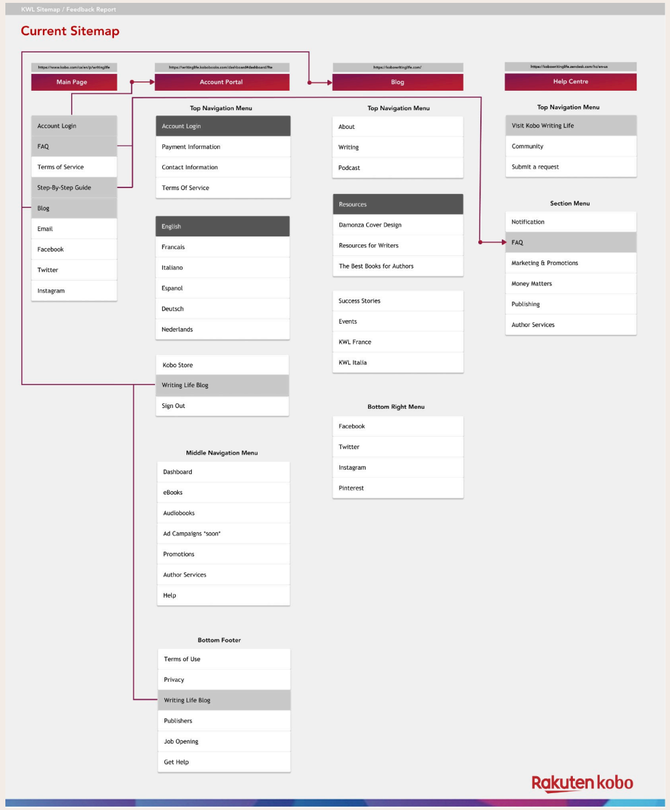
Landing page report

Feedback annotated section by section.

Current sitemap

Main page, account portal, blog and help centre each live on a separate domain.







Thank you

Solida Sar · design + code

solidasar@gmail.com · www.SolidaSar.com · linkedin.com/in/SolidaSar