ZenHub Spotlight on PolicyGenius

We love companies dedicated to making life easier for everyone. That's one of the reasons why we are such big fans of Brooklyn-based PolicyGenius – they are tackling the large, hairy problem of purchasing insurance in a whole new way.

In a world of claims and liabilities, consumers are almost always stressed out by long and verbose policies and worried about that "gotcha" clause they might've missed.

Tackling their consumers' pain head-on, the founders of PolicyGenius built an online insurance broker that figures out which insurance products they actually need. The broker offers unbiased comparisons, personalized advice and providing educational tools like insurance guides, product 101's, insurer report cards, and real-time insurance quotes.

This, of course, is a hugely ambitious project. What has the team been doing to ensure they are covering all the bases while working towards the same goals and hitting all their milestones on time? We decided to talk to them and find out.

Before ZenHub

Tackling such an ambitious opportunity, the team at PolicyGenius had to hold themselves to a high standard in terms of efficiency and organization. Early on, the team coalesced around collaboration tools like GitHub and Slack to keep their team on the same page and, for several months, tried using a project management tool outside of GitHub. However, the engineering and product teams felt bogged down with micro-managing tickets and having to manually enter in estimates for every task.

"The biggest pain point was being unable to quickly allocate tasks and see what people were working on," said Ian Yamey, Policy Genius's CTO, adding that many project management tools were needlessly complicated.

"With so much going on, I didn't want to have to look at too many places at once," Ian said. All the extra features and frills actually made the tools less effective, and since the team worked primarily in GitHub, Ian was looking to minimize the services they were using.

So, what to do?

Finding Zen in ZenHub

When ZenHub was in pre-launch mode, Ian found our landing page and began testing the product with his team.

The first thing that struck him was its simplicity. "Zenhub is the simplest way to manage our roadmap and keep us focused," he told us. "We actually love the features that it doesn't have. ZenHub has just enough to foster collaboration and hit our milestones without the distraction and overhead of bigger tools."

It was important for the PolicyGenius team to remain flexible and ruthlessly focused on the most important tasks, especially when they initially began with product development. In those early stages, the team was dealing with detailed estimates and strict release schedules, often months in advance. But this created stress, slipping deadlines and tension between completing milestones based on prior internal commitments and the need to implement new features based on insights from user testing and analytics. That's when ZenHub's Kanban boards came to the rescue.

"A shift to a Kanban-style approach has given us the flexibility and agility to change our heading when we need to, while still providing our marketing team with enough insight into what to feature in upcoming campaigns," Ian said.

ZenHub's Boards guided the development – from the initial user stories and design wireframes to backend development and infrastructure coordination – of PolicyGenius's Personal Insurance Checkup.

ZenHub is for Everyone

The PolicyGenius team currently consists of eight awesome developers, designers, marketers and writers.

Using ZenHub helped give non-tech users at PolicyGenius a chance to watch the progress of each feature move from "Backlog" to "Done". It has also allowed each individual designer, developer and writer to be autonomous – accepting issues of their choosing from the board – while remaining aligned with the rest of the team and overall roadmap.

"ZenHub has been a good 'gateway-drug' to get our marketers and writers using GitHub and shipping code," Ian said. "They've graduated from creating 'please change this content' issues via the board to browsing via GitHub and editing code themselves. We'll make developers out of them yet!"

We can't wait to see what the team at PolicyGenius will come up with next. The way they're going, they might even manage to make insurance shopping fun!

"We've taken an education-focused approach," Ian told us. "The goal is to have customers understand and trust what they are buying, rather than feeling compelled to buy through fear or confusion."