

Sitepath Diagramming

Sitepath diagramming is a sketching system in which you try to determine who the users of the site will be and what sorts of activities they'll try to accomplish. This allows you to decide what you need to design and determine what designs will be most crucial to the success of the Web site.

Sitepath diagramming is especially good for determining site flow, early interaction design, and workflow. By drawing the sitepaths for your different users, you're better able to get your head around complicated problems or see if you've forgotten anything.

They're also really good at showing similar processes you can design for one type of user and reuse for all of them. When you write separate scenarios for different personas, it's easy to imagine designing a different interface for each persona. The sitepath diagram reveals places where your personas can use the same interface. In the end, this means you can design and develop fewer features while retaining the same great experience.

How to do sitepath diagramming

You can create sitepath diagrams by yourself, but they're definitely fun with a group. You'll need a few things:

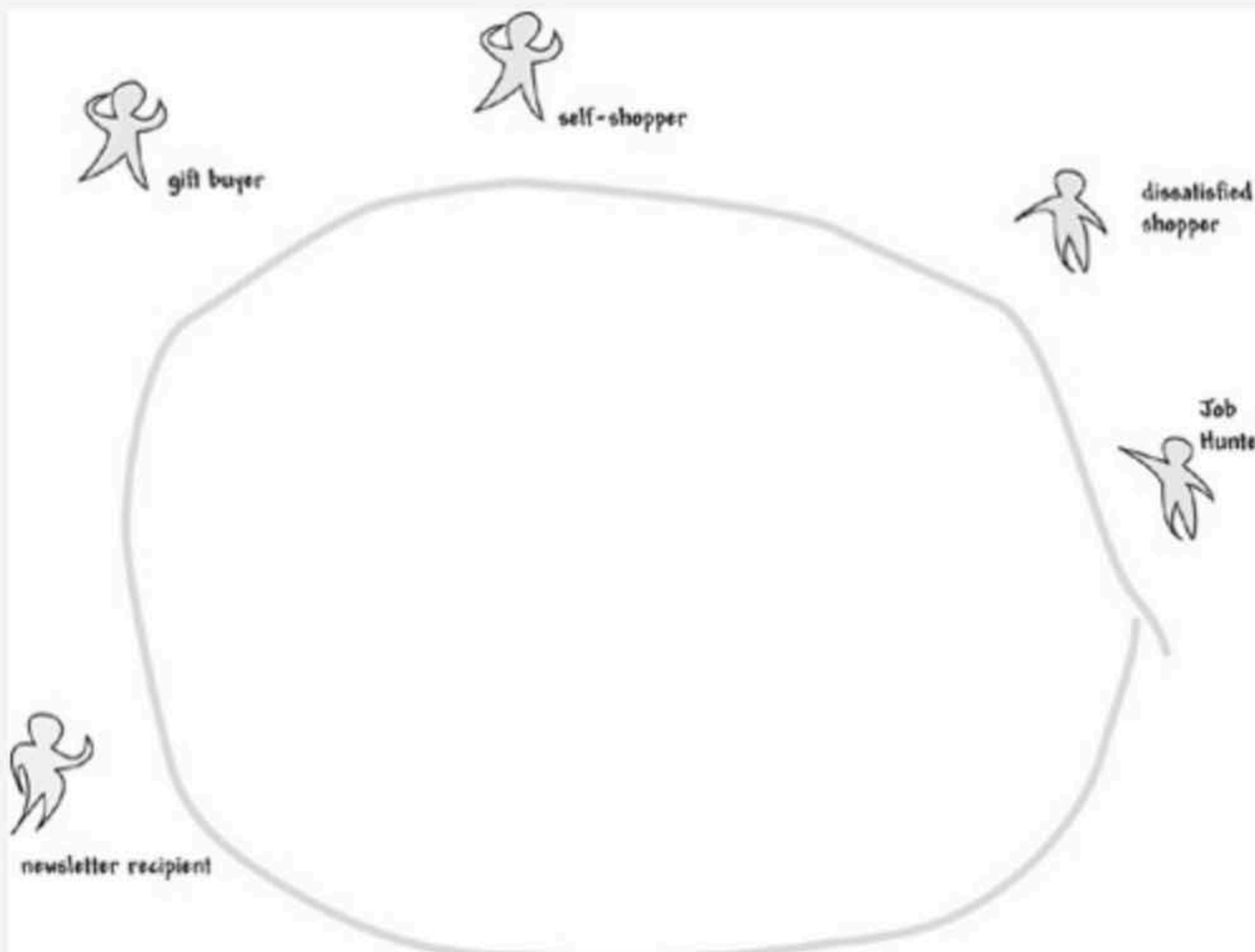
- Something to draw on, the bigger the better. Whiteboards are great, but you can also use butcher paper or oversize pads of paper.
- Lots of different colored markers.
- The ability to draw some little people. Stick figures are perfect.^[7]
- Personas, if you already have them.

Once you have everything ready, it's time to start by drawing your users:

- Begin by drawing a big circle. This is the interactive system. It could be the Web site or a set of interconnected Web sites. That decision can be made later. For now, stick with the big picture and think: "This is the system."
- Put in as many types of people as you think would interact with the system you're designing. We usually put the obvious users of the site in the upper left. These are your usual visitors who come in through a

search engine or who type your URL into the address box and enter through the homepage.

- Try to think of alternative ways people might come to the site—a newsletter, for example—and put them in the lower left.
- Finally, try to think of people who would use the site in a very different way and put them on the right. Members of the press, potential investors, and job hunters often fall into this category. These are guidelines only. You can do it any way you please. We do it this way in hopes of having enough space to fit in all the interactions.



The circle is your “system.” The little people scattered around the edge are your users.

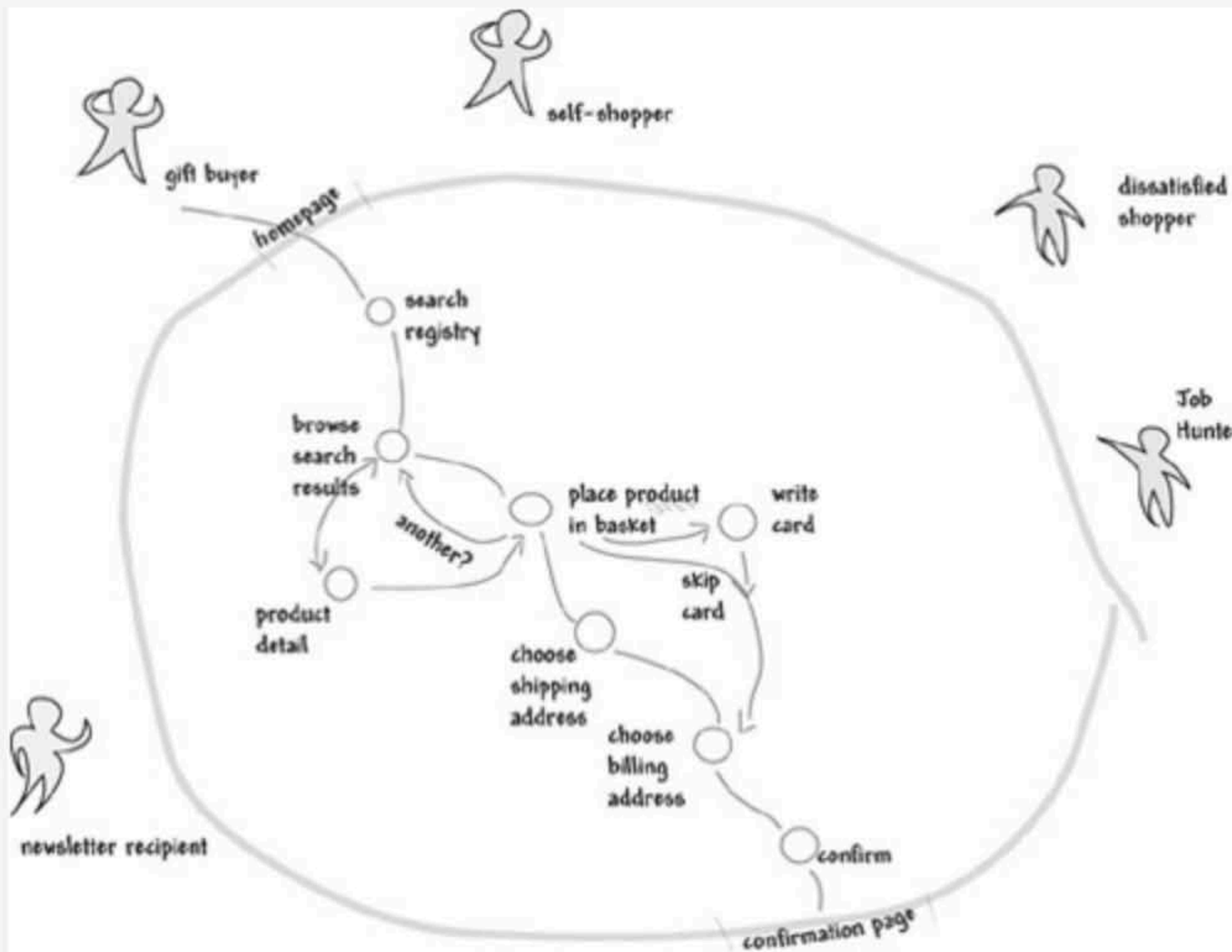
Now start thinking about your scenarios. If you’ve formally documented scenarios, you can return to those. If you haven’t, you can make them up as you go along.

Suppose that you are diagramming a small ecommerce site. Let’s tell the story of a person who has to buy a gift for a wedding:

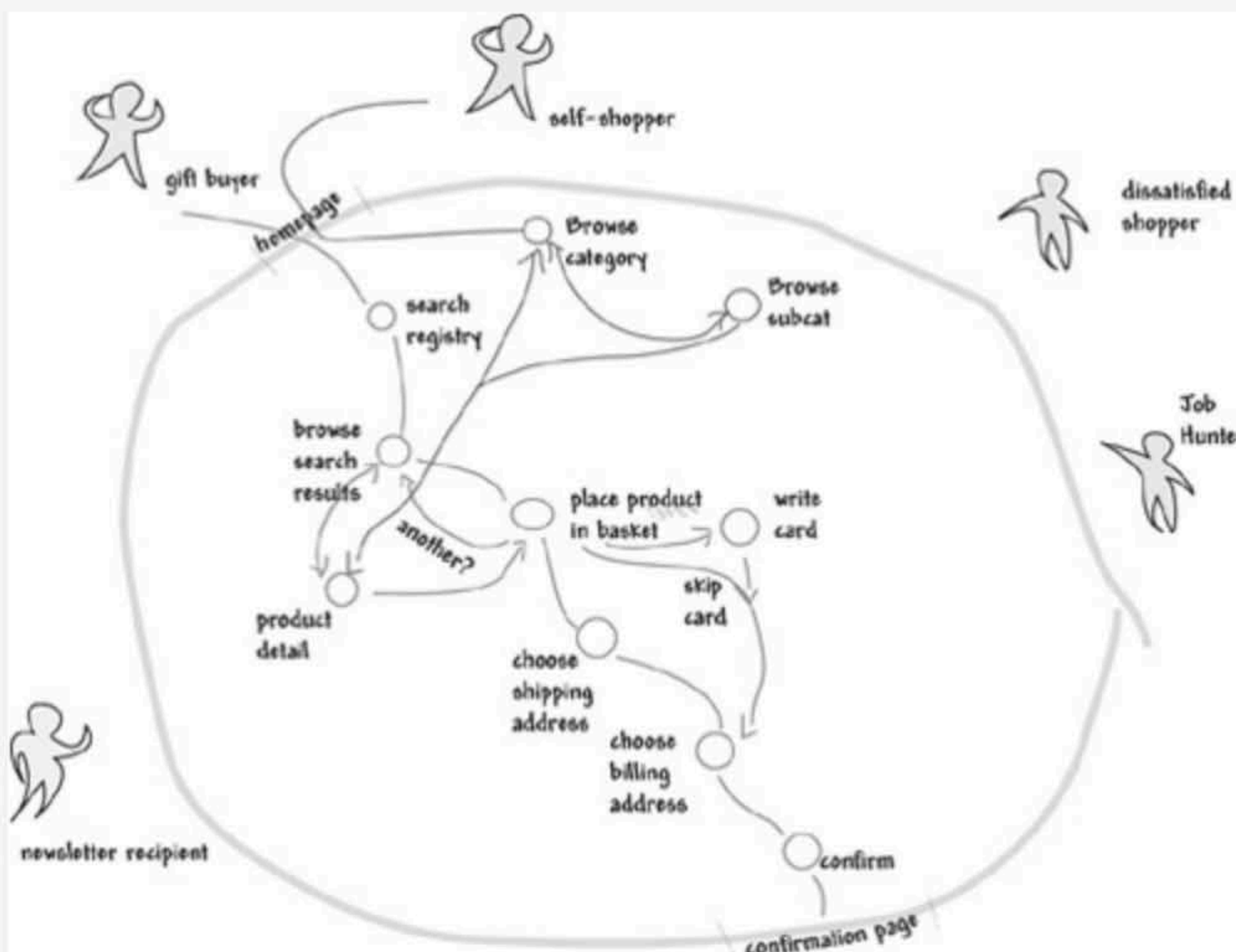
- Start at the homepage, find the wedding registry, and search for the name of your friend.
- Then select a gift, purchase it, write a card, and send it off.

For each event that will happen in the system, draw a circle, and draw arrows from circle to circle showing what happens next

Each circle might be one page, part of a page, or several pages. Don't worry about those details yet. The key is to get the ideas out of your head and onto the page. If you get caught up in details at this stage, you'll get stuck again. Just keep scribbling. Draw out the entire story, and be sure to mark the exit point where your person leaves the system.

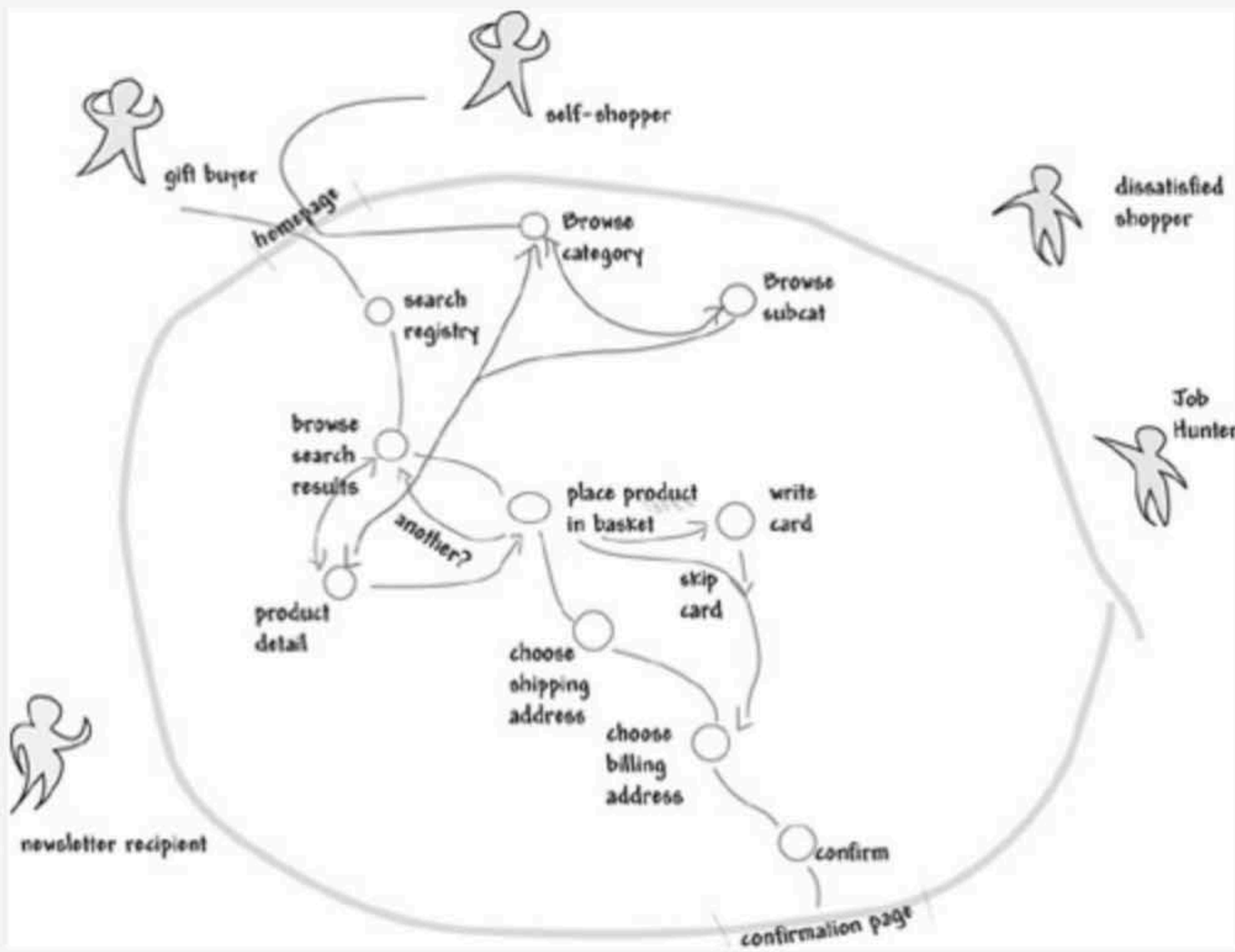


Next, add another path. You may realize you can reuse elements you diagrammed already. Feel free to connect to them. Some people like to retrace the line as well, to show that multiple people may take the same path.

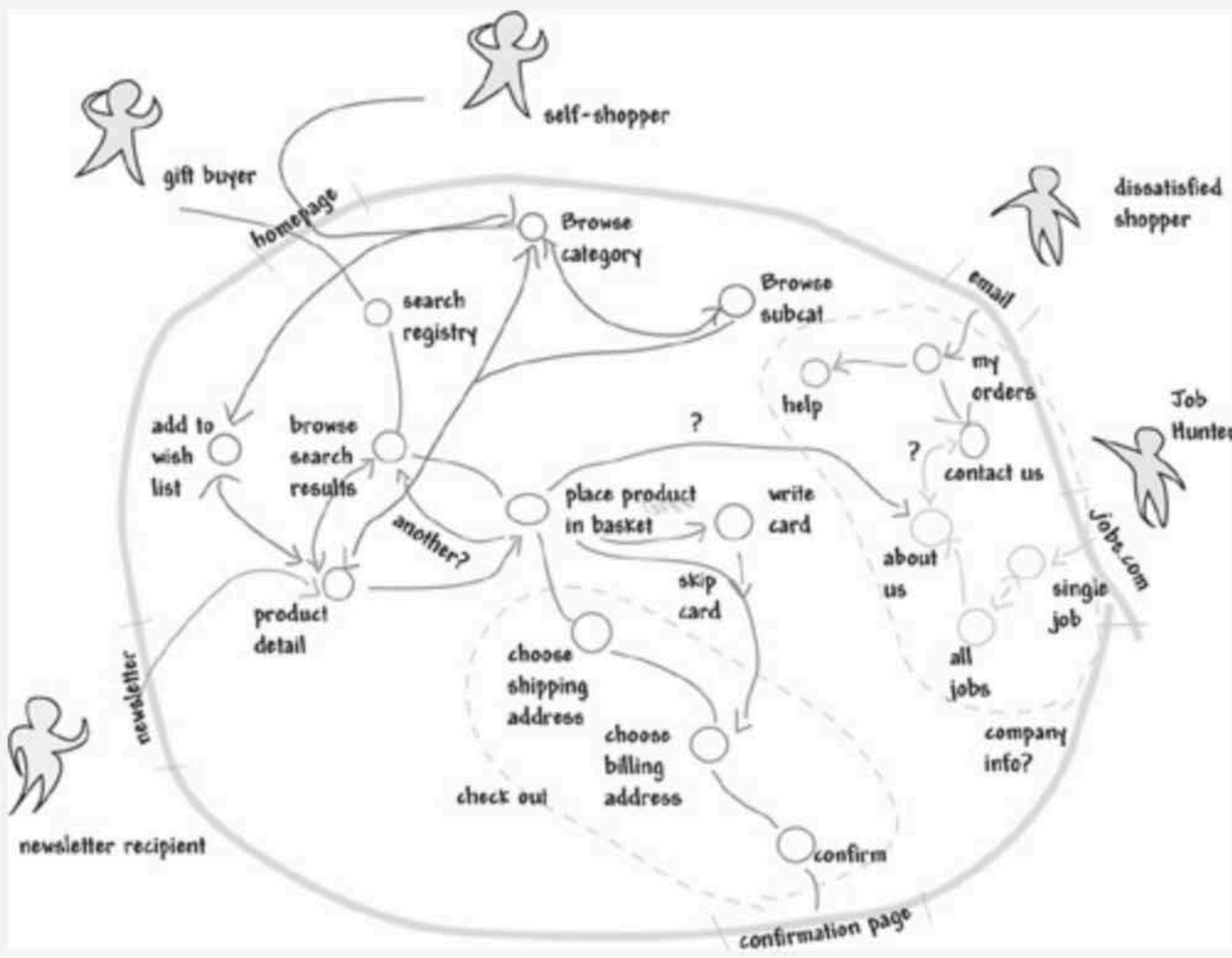


Keep going. You may find areas of the site you think belong together—go ahead and indicate that. You may also find connections that aren't dictated by the

diagrammed already. Feel free to connect to them. Some people like to retrace the line as well, to show that multiple people may take the same path.



Keep going. You may find areas of the site you think belong together—go ahead and indicate that. You may also find connections that aren't dictated by the scenarios. Note those, too, but you may want to remind yourself that they were gut reactions. A small question mark is a good way to note that. Later, when you move into a more analytical, evaluative mode, you can consider those choices.



Like your scenarios, the sitepath diagram will reveal features and interactions you might not have thought of. Not only that, but when you're done, you'll have a nice picture of how the system should work.