



# Billy Cash: saving for happiness

Design by Santiago De Francisco Vela

Text by Pieter Desmet

Money doesn't buy happiness. Or does it? Research has shown that: It is our activities that make us happy, not the products we surround ourselves with. A new TV, smartphone, pair of shoes, kitchen appliances or a car – they may give us brief joy, but the happiness-effect does not last. Activities and the new experiences we gain through these activities have a much longer effect on our happiness. In other words, if you wish to invest in your happiness, you don't spend your money on new products, but rather on new activities and experiences. But, what about saving? Nearly everyone saves or has saved money at some point. Can the activity of saving contribute to our happiness? Designer Santiago De Francisco Vela designed a digital money box that gives saving a deeper meaning.

## The money box

Saving is the activity of 'setting something aside for the future'; setting aside part of your income to spend it on something in the future without having to borrow money. Children traditionally save with a money box. The box makes saving literally tangible: The physical presence motivates saving and the weight is an immediate indicator of the progress. Adults usually save digitally, for instance through online banking. Digital money boxes are efficient, but they miss the tangible qualities of the piggy bank.

### The meaning of saving

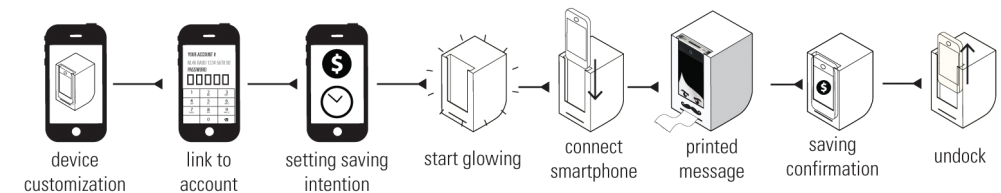
Santiago aimed to design a form of digital saving that can contribute to the saver's happiness by making saving tangible again. In his research, he discovered three key insights. Imagine you are saving up for a new pair of running shoes. The first insight was that saving is more meaningful when the relation to the saving goal is made more tangible – the running shoes. The second insight was that ‘the thing itself’ does not make the saver happier, but rather the activities that he or she will undertake with the product: The activity of running rather than the shoes themselves. And the third insight was that the contribution to happiness is mainly driven by specific and personal qualities of those activities. The joy of exercising outside, the feeling of physical fitness afterwards, the satisfaction of running with friends, or perhaps a combination of those qualities. On the basis of those three insights, Santiago came up with the idea to develop a money box that encourages you to save in a way that makes you more aware of how what you are saving up for will contribute to your personal well-being.

### Making saving tangible

The design is called Billy Cash: a combination of a base station (Billy) and a smartphone app (Cash). As soon as you put your smartphone in Billy, it turns



into a money box. Billy Cash helps you to organise saving. You choose a character and enter your savings goal and savings time. Billy gives you the overview of the progress of your savings and motivates you to achieve your goal. But it does much more than that. It guides you in discovering the deeper meaning of the product (or experience) you are saving for, in terms of what you are going to do with it, how it will enrich your life and what personal values it represents. Periodically, Billy prints small labels with questions that stimulate you to think about the meaning of your savings goal. Examples include:

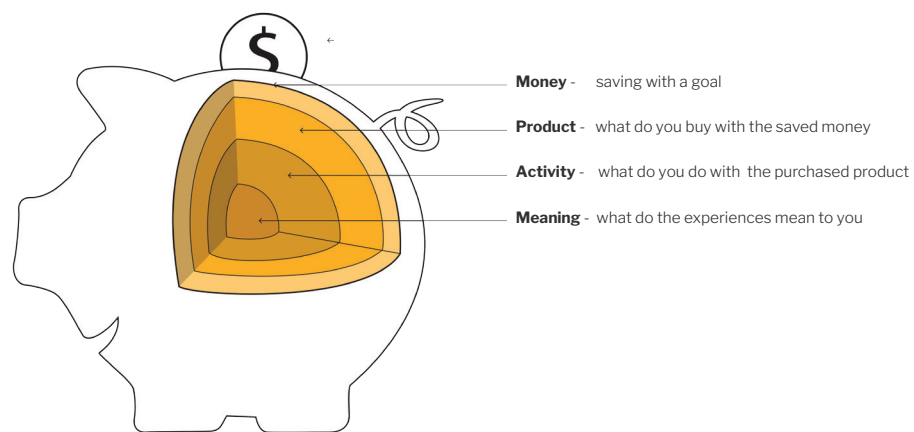


‘Which personal talents and skills will you utilise and develop with your running shoes?’ ‘How will your running shoes stimulate your creativity?’ ‘Can you contribute to your community with your running shoes?’ ‘What can you learn from your running shoes?’ By encouraging reflection, Billy Cash helps you to discover the true value of your savings goal.

### Saving for happiness

Santiago has had his Billy Cash tested by various people. Billy appeared to have a stronger impact

on their saving behaviour than he had anticipated. The stimulating questions encouraged people to think about the necessity of their savings goals: ‘Is this product really worth saving for?’ Some users came to the realisation that their savings goal would probably not contribute to their happiness as much as they had initially thought. And so, they adapted their savings goals. ‘I really don’t need a new TV; I’ll save up for a trip to Brazil!’ Saving as time for consideration – and that is how Billy helps you to spend money on what truly makes you happy.



**Santiago De Francisco Vela** developed Billy Cash as a thesis project for the master’s programme *Design for Interaction* at the TU Delft. The project was Santiago’s own initiative in collaboration with the *Delft Institute of Positive Design* (DIOPD) and Rabobank NL with the goal to explore how saving can contribute to happiness. Thesis supervisors were Pieter Desmet and Mafalda Casais (TU Delft). A film clip of Billy Cash: <https://vimeo.com/101157931> For more information: [www.diopd.org](http://www.diopd.org)

# Colophon

## **Billy Cash: Saving for happiness**

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Download a free version of the booklet at [www.diopd.org](http://www.diopd.org)

## **Reference**

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