RCUE Visual Design Study Results

UXD Team

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Methodology

- A/B test using an HTML click-thru with Photoshop mockups.
- Two facilitators, on location in Westford, MA.
- 2 days: April 11 – 12, 2013.
- 12 participants.
- Comparative data for each design, including:
    - Likes/dislike
    - Overall preference
    - Degree of preference
- Participants were also asked to provided product-specific requirements.
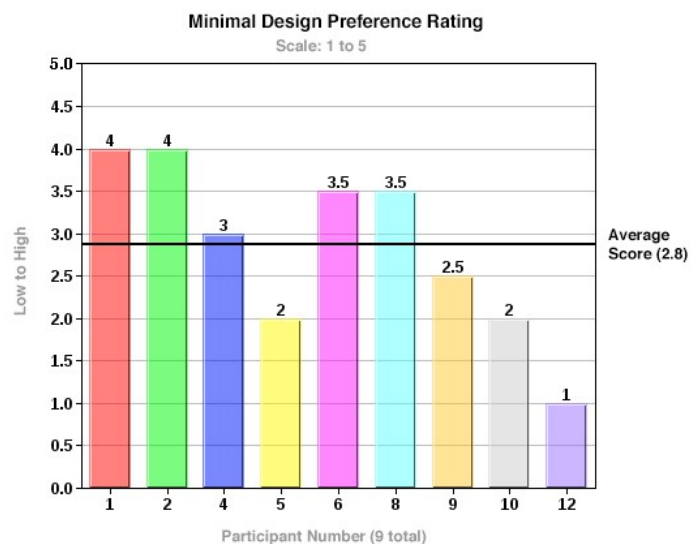- Not covered: Product branding elements.

Executive Summary

"Minimal design"
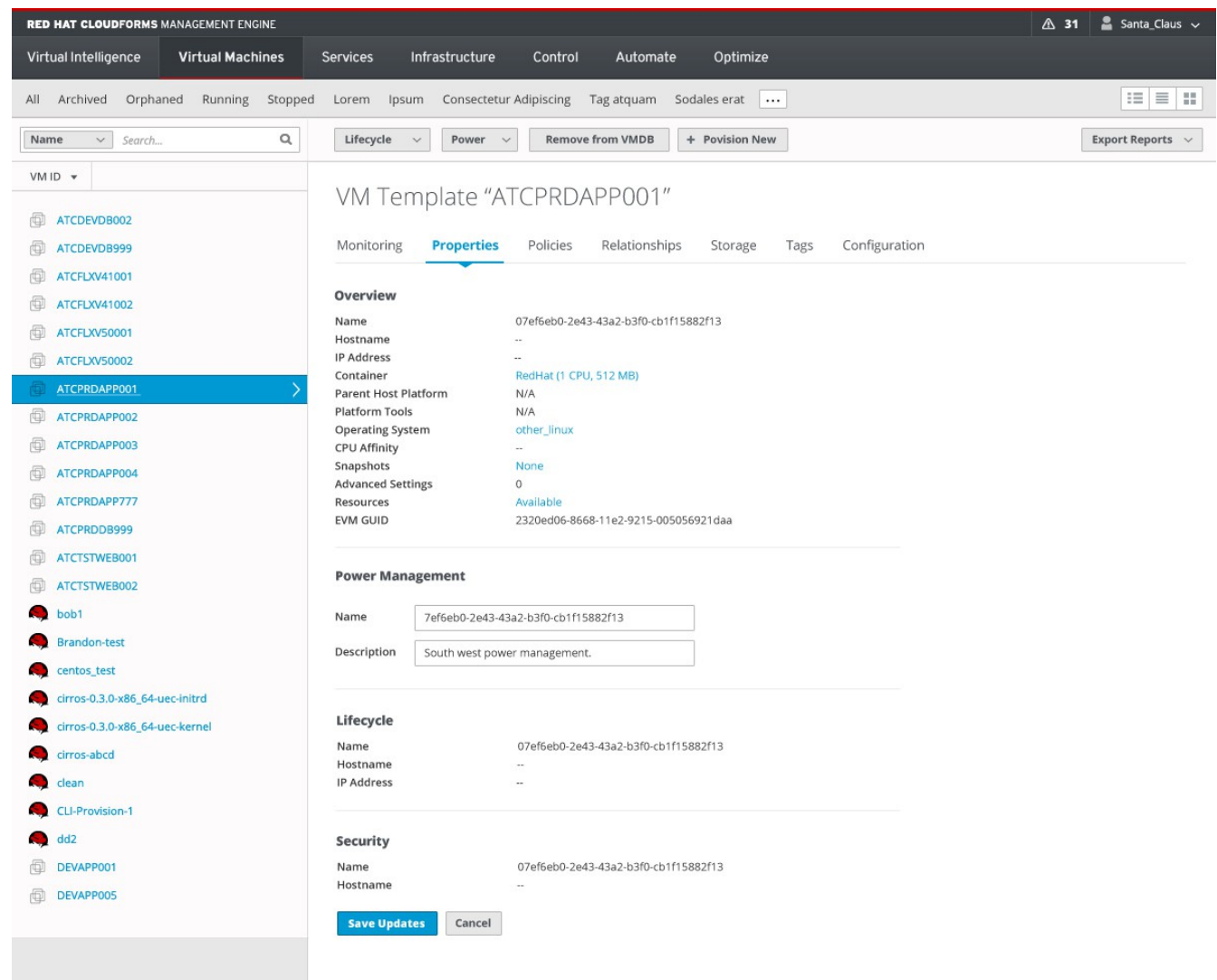
Nine, out of the twelve participants interviewed, preferred the "Minimal" design.
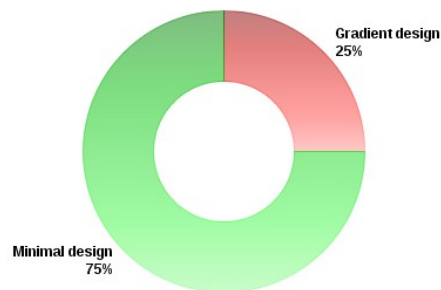
For those participants, the preference for this design was slightly above a median score.

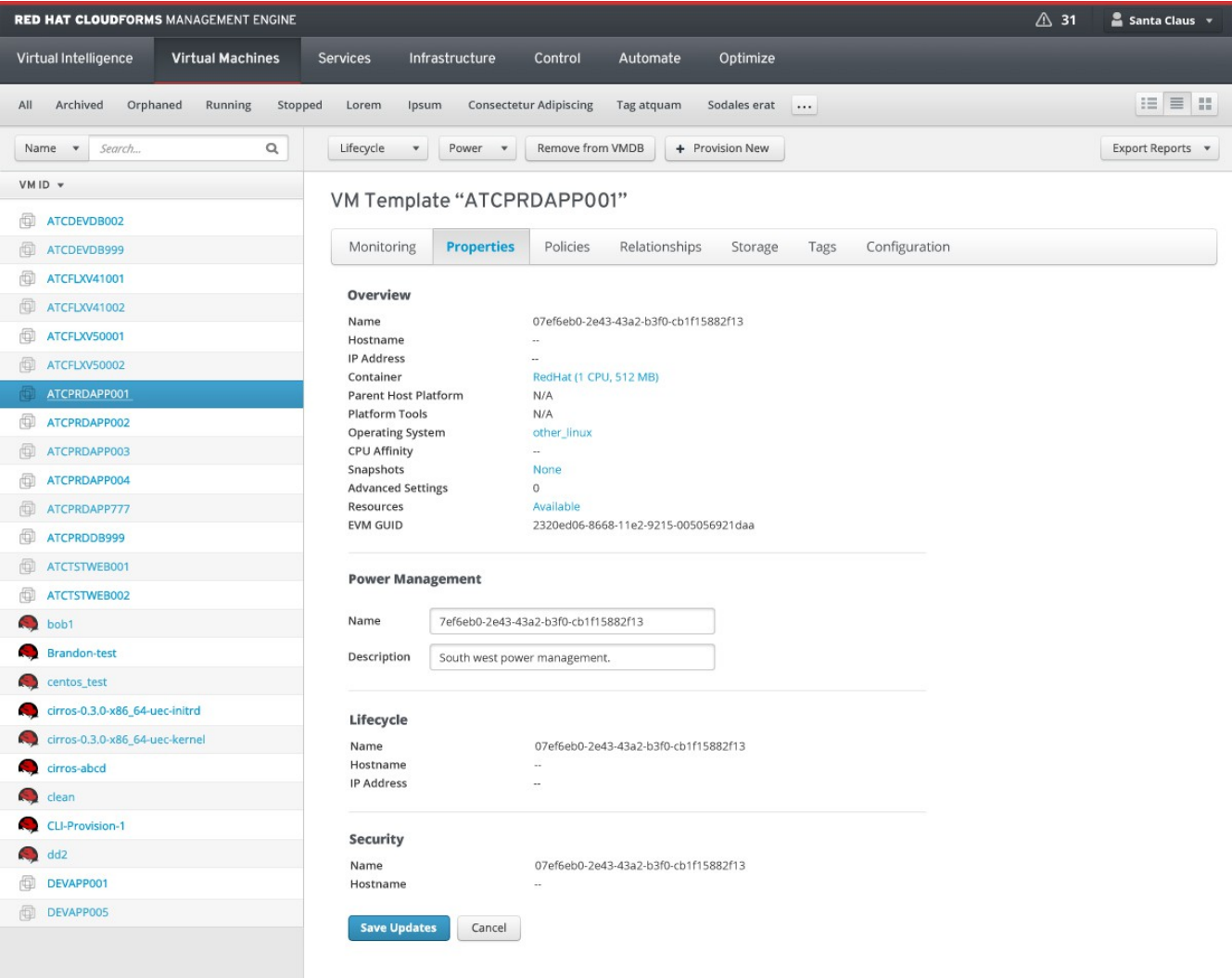**Minimal Design Preference Rating**
Scale: 1 to 5

Of the respondents who preferred it, most described the design as clean and airy. These qualities were often equated with having a modern feel.

Visual design elements were favorably defined as "square-edged" and "flat." The general perception was that the flatter design treatment allowed the application content to be more visible, because there was less "visual noise" in the form of gradients and other stylistic embellishments.

The most commonly cited issues with the minimal design were: that the interactive elements were not well understood as actionable; and that the visual decoration, that existed, needed refinement.

"Gradients design"

Three, out of the twelve participants interviewed, preferred the "Gradients" design. Participants who preferred the Gradient design had a strong preference for it, the preference rating was well above the median.
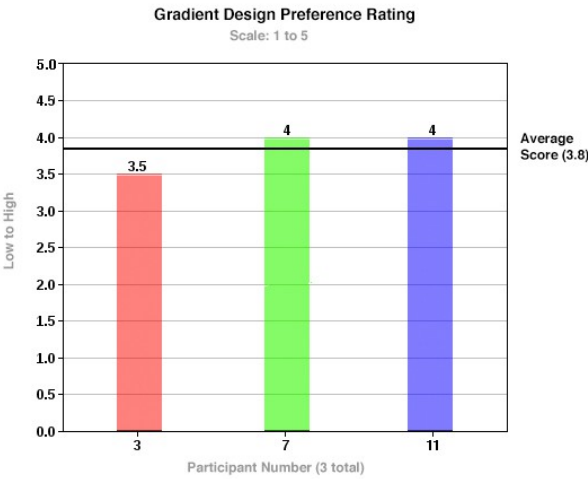
In general, the use of gradients seem to both work for and against this design. Many participants commented that the design held together well, from a visual hierarchy perspective. They cited that the gradients created dimension and helped to structure the design. Interactive components, such as buttons and tabs, were easily noticed and understood as clickable.

Although many commented on the overuse of gradients, particularly on components within the content area (like tables). The perceived overuse made the screen appear too blended and difficult to parse quickly.

Design Recommendations

Most of the participants preferred the "Minimal" design. Although they did not, on average, feel strongly about preferring it over the "Gradient" design. The preferences rating for this design was close to a median score.

The overall design recommendation aligns with the suggestions made by many participants – to refine the Minimal design and to incorporate some aspects of the Gradient design.

Add gradients (dimension) to interactive elements.

While the flatter UI styling was generally preferred as an overall design direction, many participants expressed concerns around using a flat treatment on interactive elements. Buttons, and other form elements, were not always perceived as "actionable." Any confusion around the communication of state or actionability could pose a serious usability issue. It is therefore highly recommended that the minimal design incorporate some visual styling that conveys dimension for interactive elements. This recommendation would be further supported by offering visual solutions for various interaction states (such as hover).

Minimize lines, borders and glyphs.

The streamlined design quality of the "Minimal" design made any extra "decoration" more apparent. Many participants commented on the excessive use of lines – lines were used to delineate segments of the UI and as borders on design components. The stated concerns were principally visual in nature. Some felt that the lines were visually disruptive, others suggested that the treatment lacked refinement. Similarly participants were equally critical of smaller design elements, such as arrow glyphs and the like.

To address these concerns, it is recommended that the design use "white space" to visually define areas of the screen wherever possible. For individual design components where lines act as borders, refining the visual prominence of the borders could offer a solution. Small visual indicators, (such as arrows, checks, add or remove symbols and etc.), should be careful to have a consistent visual language in order to minimize additional "visual noise."