

Usability Issues: Steam Mobile App

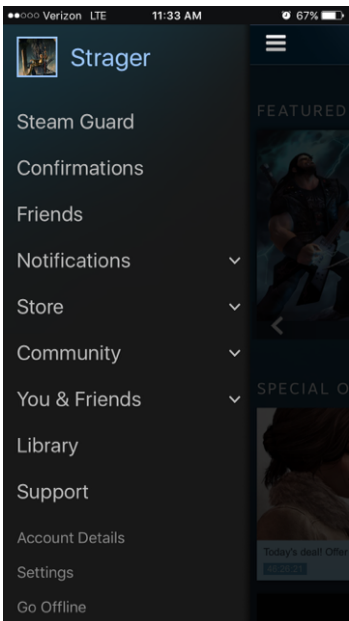
An Interaction Study by Chris Korkos

0: Introduction

- By building a mobile app, Steam demonstrated an interest in connecting users to their products at all times. This is a trend in our digital age, and can be useful when a company offers services that are available on the go. Steam can be useful on mobile devices for a number of reasons, but as a result of five usability issues, I believe it falls short of the unifying product that it could be.

1: Inconsistent Information Architecture

- Issues
 - It is crucial, in applications that are used across multiple devices, to have a consistent information layout. People expect similar drop downs, links, and menus. They don't like surprises.
 - And Steam's mobile application is full of them. The hamburger menu in the app's top left corner navigates the user throughout the store, library, friends list, and so on. But its layout has elements that directly conflict and is generally inconsistent with the interfaces on the desktop app and website.
 - The main issues are the repetition of page names, the non-intuitive naming of links, and the existence of drop downs that overlap in meaning or content.



- Solution
 - I propose a more simplified, streamlined menu that reflects the page present on both the desktop and web interfaces. The categories will be Notifications, Store, Community, User, Wishlist, About, and Support. Subcategories will also be organized in a more intuitive

| | |
|--|---|
|  User | |
| Notifications | |
| Store | ▼ |
| Community | ▼ |
| User | ▼ |
| Wishlist | |
| About | |
| Support | |
| Account Details | |
| Settings | |
| Go Offline | |

manner.

- I ranked this problem first because knowing where one needs to navigate and how to do so are absolutely paramount to not becoming frustrated with an application. Frustrated users will be unable to find key functions and may simply give up on the app.

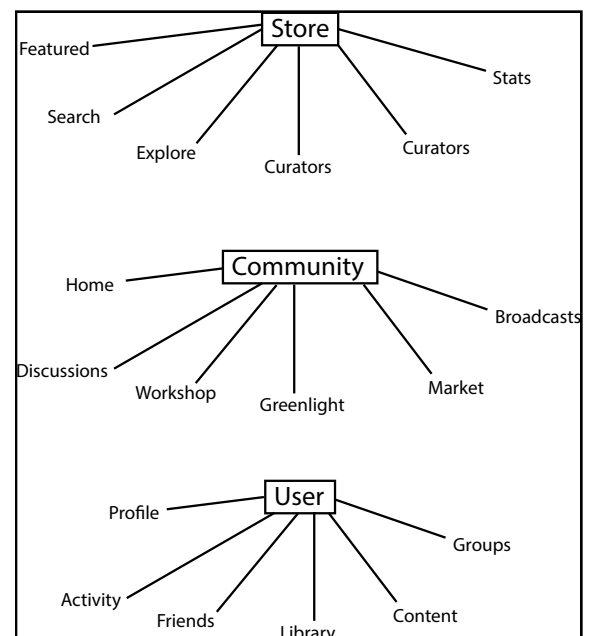
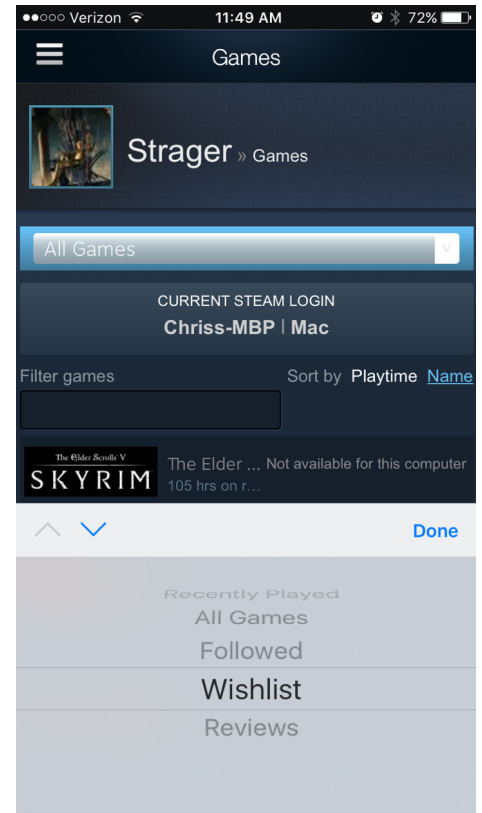
2: Best Feature (Wishlist) is Wasted

- Issues

- Steam is known for occasional massive sales, and the Wishlist page in the application will send notifications when a Wishlist item is discounted. This is intelligent from both a marketing perspective and a user experience one - users are notified about when they can save on a game, and the company makes money by increasing their products' appeal.
- The problem is that the Wishlist is almost impossible to find. Instinct is to assume it will be under the "Store" tab, but in actuality a user must go to "Library" then change the category at the top to "Wishlist".
- This is a problem for two reasons. One, "Library" implies you have already bought the games and this is the place where you view and play them. If someone has a list of items they *want* to buy, they most likely would not look for them next to what they have *already* bought. Two, the Wishlist is several clicks away from the starting page. This places it at a very low priority of use, when in fact it is the page in which mobile users will find the most utility.

- Solution

- I propose a redesign of the navigation menu which moves Library inside the User section. Wishlist would also be removed from the Library section and presented as its own item on the top menu. I believe this enhances the app's



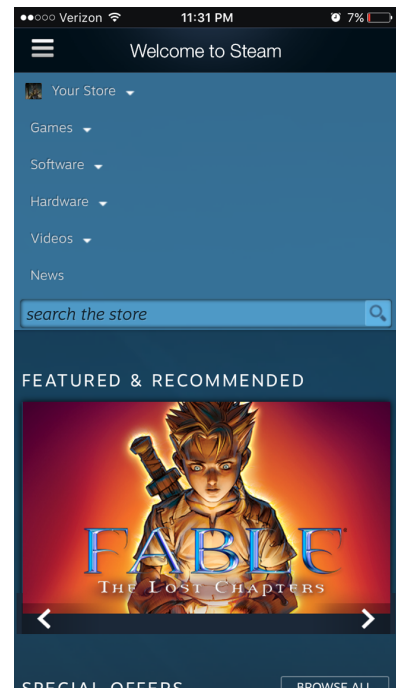
navigation experience because Steam doesn't offer mobile games and therefore mobile users must prioritize what they *want* to play over what they *can* play.

- I ranked this problem second because every application needs at least one feature that can sell it as useful. An app must solve a need that its average user will have. This app solves the need to view games that you might want to buy while on the go, through the use of the Wishlist. With that in mind, it should be prioritized first with regards to the app's interface.

3: Hidden Interface Options

- Issues

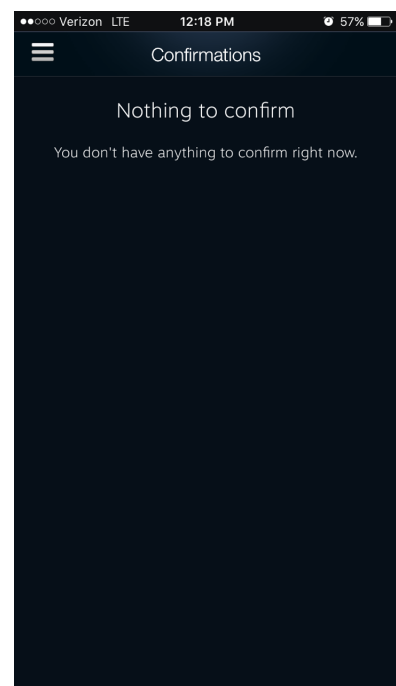
- In "Featured Items" in the Store section, the page loads at what seems to be the top. There is a banner with some ads and the featured games beneath it. The top bar says "Welcome to Steam". Everything implies you are at the top of the page. But when users scroll up, they find a full menu with drop downs and page links and a search bar.
- This issue is baffling because it's so easy to resolve. I understand what they were going for - as the menu does take up a lot of space - but it could still be shown on page by grouping them all into a single drop down or by just including an up arrow saying "menu".



4: Lack of Textual Direction

- Issues

- Specifically, the fourth problem presents itself through the button for "Confirmations". The name doesn't hint at any specific kinds of confirmations I might be making, and the text inside doesn't help me understand it any further. I tested to see if it was for cart items or pending purchases, but this proved unsuccessful. I still haven't discovered its purpose, and neither the desktop app nor the website present the same button.



- This issue is not constrained to one frustrating button, but can also be found in the drop down menu names. “Community” and “You & Friends” are so similar that they could nearly be the same tag. A better name could adequately suit the full contents of each and reduce confusion on a higher informational level.

5: Multiple Links to a Single Page

- Issues

- The user’s profile page can be reached from “You & Friends” in the hamburger menu, or by clicking on the profile image at the top. Only one is necessary, but both are included.
- The conflict between these multiple targets demonstrates a lack of design planning and ultimately keeps users from learning to click each button quickly. Following a link to a new page can be reinforced and actually sped up if there is less clutter and fewer alternatives.

