League of Legends Client: A Usability and Design Evaluation

Brian Batinchok

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League of Legends is an online video game played by millions of people each day. Riot Games, the creators of League of Legends, use a client application built on Adobe Air for performing actions, such as creating a game or buying game-related items. When the user is ready to play the game is launched while the client stays open in the background. The game is then launched in a separate window.

The client is easy to navigate and does a great job of performing the many actions expected of it. That being said, the application has some issues, a few being major, that prevent it from being a top notch client. By addressing these issues, Riot Games could create a much more user-friendly experience for the client and the users that interact with it.

**Ease of Navigation**

The League of Legends client presents information in a straight-forward manner. After logging in with an account a home screen provides information on upcoming in-game events, special sales, and information on events relating to the game (see Figure One for a screenshot). From the splash screen the user can navigate to a tab for purchases, a player summary, the friends list, and options relating to the client. Buttons on the interface accurately reflect the actions that will be performed. While this is easy to navigate and takes little time to familiarize with one big functionality flaw are the options themselves: these options apply only to the client, not to the game that is launched from the client. As an example, changing the volume from the client applies that sound change to the client and leaves volume inside the game window unchanged. This is a consistency issue and a redundant feature for users to deal with.

A major draw for League of Legends are in-game purchases by users. The Purchases tab presents a list of actions or items for the user to choose, ranging from Champions to unlock or account options, such as changing a user name. Navigation in this area is very straightforward: buttons are labeled clearly with what they represent (see Figure Two). A refund tab was recently added for users who want to refund a purchase made with currency outside of the game. When performing a purchase within this tab users are met with a confirmation screen for purchases made with currency or in-game points. This design dialog ensures that the user is purchasing the intended item that he or she selected (Figure Three) and offers relief to the user, an issue that Schneiderman points to as important. There is less anxiety from the user when he or she knows that an action can be done.

The League of Legends client does not utilize a normal menu bar and does not have an indicator for the top of a window. Moving the window can be somewhat troublesome because the edge of the bar is not indicated by the client. This action can take multiple click and drags to move and can be frustrating for the user to deal with.

As a globally popular game it is important that Riot Games keep a universal interface experience across all continents. Some professional players will visit overseas and will have little knowledge of the language in the country of which they are visiting. The same interface is implemented across all servers and continents for this reason. Users in China and Korea will have the same interface experience as users in North America and Europe.

**Application Performance**

There are severe optimization issues with the client that lead to frustrating performance issues for users. A major gripe within the community is the overall performance speed of the client. League of Legends built the application on Adobe Air which leads to sluggish performance over something such as HTML5. Riot Games has stated that there is a plan to move from Air to HTML5 but progress remains to be seen. There is lag time when selecting all options in the Purchases tab and information your personal profile. Typically three or four seconds will pass before all information on the page will be interactive. In addition to the delay between selections the application itself has a high short term memory load, using over 500MB of memory while idle (Figure Four). When the game is running the total memory load can be over 4GB while games similar to League of Legends, such as DOTA2, will use half of that amount. The game is linked to the client while playing; terminating the client to save memory will also terminate the game being played.

**Troubleshooting**

The League of Legends client has millions of unique users each day and is expected to perform flawlessly with .05% margin of error. The interface itself will not produce many errors in terms of usability. However, should a user encounter an error related to the interface or the game itself, the only option for receiving information is to use the official website for a response. Unfortunately, the client does not have a built-in contact system to report or receive feedback to and from Riot Games. Having a built-in contact system could help users receive help that they need without going through the official forums or e-mail account. By having that system in place users would not have to use third-party or outside tools for assistance inside the client application.

**Interface Design**

Overall interface design of the League of Legends client is quite good. There is consistency in design elements, such as using the same textures for buttons, same font, and same coloring across the entire interface. Buttons without text accurately reflect the actions that will be performed when the button is pressed. Two examples would be clicking the human heads to open the friends list or the chat bubbles to open up chat room options. While the design itself seems dated compared to today’s minimalistic design trends, it is still functional and easy to use.

One issue with these buttons is legibility of the text on buttons themselves, specifically in the Purchases tab. The buttons have a gradient texture with a thin, white font on top. This can be an issue when reading as the gradient can obscure some letters when the tab is highlighted (Figure Five). Users with impaired vision could have trouble distinguishing letters between each other. Schneiderman makes the point of striving for consistency in this regard; the elements should be both easy to read and easy to navigate.

Another major concern with the overall design is how the friend chat system works. When a user is messaged a chat window appears on the bottom of the client, obscuring vision of the interface in that area. This action crowds the interface and either forces a response from the user or motivates the user to minimize/close the new chat window to continue use of the client (Figure Six).

**Conclusion**

Riot Games has made a robust client that fills many roles for its users, whether it be in-game purchases or customizing your character before your next game. Interface functionality is very high but lacks in overall system performance, readability of action buttons, and crowding of the interface from some elements, the friend messages being the main issue. By addressing and fixing these issues, Riot Games could create an interface that is as seamless and fun to use as the game the client serves.

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