Case Study_Iron Vice

User Interface/User Experience Design

Objective: As part of internship for Blacktower Entertainment, a Seattle company developing a role-playing video game, a partner and I were tasked with re-designing and programming the games main 'Lobby'.

The main tools and concepts used:

- Atomic Design
- Heuristics
- Usability Inspection
- Wireframing
- Sketch
- HTML5
- CSS(Sass)
- Javascript(Ember)

Context: This 'lobby' screen is a user interface where players arrive just before the gameplay begins. Here they're able to check in with the details of the mission, see their character's current health and holdings (points, armor, medicine, etc.), to see some of the same details of other players in the mission, as well as have the option to back out before starting the gameplay.

The "Before" Screen

First impressions

- Need cohesiveness; many scattered elements.
- Actionable items don't stand out enough.
- Certain items unintentionally appear as actionable (buttons).
- Players need avatars, more space to show character detail.
- Hierarchy, proportionality really needs attention.

Process - Wireframes

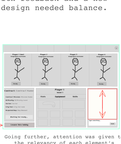
Approach: In order to gain more understanding of what we were working with, it was necessary to go through the game from the beginning, the same as any user (game-player) would. The developers were set on the info that needed to be included on the lobby screen, and the color palette. The screen's layout, hierarchy, and overall aestetic proportionality were in our hands.
We began by grouping together particular details and groups of information in a more modular fashion. These could then be wireframed onto a more cohesive grid system, with usability in mind.

Here are the first "quick and dirty" proposed wireframes.

Iteration is the name of the game.
Not surprisingly, these first few rough ideas didn't receive any rave reviews. And that's okay. This process itself equips you to better move forward and improve your design. Cohesiveness and grouping were approved, and with feedback and a new perspective we could see the design needed balance.

Getting there…

Like with any interface, players' eyes will scan the lobby in an **F-shaped** pattern. The most important, and quickest, info they'll get here is to see who's playing. Character avatars should go right on that first gaze.



Going further, attention was given to the relevancy of each element's location. The button that allows one to bail-out on a mission was under the chat box, since it's relevancy to the mission is the Mission/Contract/info, which also allowed the chat box to be longer, and show more of the conversation.

And finally…

Final, polished wireframe.

Next Step: Speaking in terms of Brad Frost's **Atomic Design** system - which references the main structures in chemistry as conceptual parallels for interface design - it can be said that our wireframe was now together in the form of several "organisms". Smaller still, these organisms are broken down into "molecules", which are composed of the most basic pieces, "atoms".

At that point in the design process, we could give attention to molecules and atoms, and breathe a bit more life into the interface.

Some example "molecules" put together from "atoms" such as a text, a checkmark, or the outline and fill of a button.

Several very simple atoms, making up a few molecules, and together becoming the chat box organism.

Molecules forming an "organism".

Result

After coming this far with designing the layout, we didn't at this point get to just hand it off to a front-end development team. Come to think of it, perhaps the most valuable part of this internship was having to do the work of what would normally be two separate teams in a company - UX/UI Design **and** front-end developer (UI Developer).

When it was all said and done, it was really rewarding to get the approval of the managers/game developer team. More than just, "Good job!", we actually got to see our interface in the production version of the game. The above image is an actual screenshot made during a test run.

Many thanks, again, to the Black Tower Entertainment team!