CS147 Assignment 3

Critique of QuickTime 4.0 Player

Yunn-Chyi Chao

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Section Leader: Heidy Maldonado
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Violations of the design principles:

Usability Problem 1: Not providing a title bar

The player has no title bar.

For windows users, this means the loss of visual indication to move, minimize, or maximize the player window. For Mac users, it means the loss of the ability to use the Mac’s Window Shade and Zoom features with the player.

The principle violated is “consistency”. Since title bar is a standard design for both Windows and Mac interface, users are familiar with its location and its uses (e.g. to move, minimize or maximize). Thus inconsistent with the standard interface design will not only confuse the users but also require them to re-learn many of the ‘known’ features.

Usability Problem 2: Reorder items in the favorites list

In the list box of "Organize Favorites", buttons available are delete, rename and done.

This interface indicates that rename or delete favorites from the list are the only two functions available. But the items in the list can actually be reordered. However, no indication is provided that this is possible.

The principle violated is “hidden affordances”. There is no button or other forms of indication to tell the users that reordering is possible. Users will miss this existing affordance of organizing favorites since there is no perceptual information suggesting it.

Usability Problem 3: The Advanced Controls Panel is error prone

The three sets of video controls are directly above the three sets of audio controls.
Because all of the video controls resemble arrows, and that the video buttons are several times larger than the audio buttons, it is reasonable to expect that some users will click on a video control in an attempt to change the setting of the audio display directly beneath it.

The principle violated is “error prone”. In this case, the layout of each set of the video and audio control are within close proximity (as shown by the red boxes). Visually it gives users the wrong impression that these controls belong to a group. And since the video control is bigger than the audio, it is likely that users will click on the video control for audio setting.

Usability Problem 4: button-that-looks-like-a-shirt

The Advanced Controls Panel is opened by single-clicking at the button-that-looks-like-a-shirt. The image on the button is neither resemblance to its function nor to the functions contained on the panel.

The Principle violated is “unnatural mapping”. The design of the control does not map its function, i.e. its physical appearance does not lead to immediate understanding. However, the button is not misleading in this case, since the users have no idea what it is in the first place!

Usability Problem 5: The settings are not “remembered”

The author was annoyed that the Player "forgets" the user's specified volume, bass, treble, and balance settings. The software cannot remember the state of the Advanced Controls Panel, and it cannot remember where a particular dialog had last been positioned.

The principle violated is “doesn’t produce subjective satisfaction”. Since saving the last setting is a standard practice for most software nowadays, it is natural for a user to feel annoyed if he or she has to repeat the setup every time when the player is turned on. In addition, since QuickTime Player is designed to resemblance the real-world player, users will expect it to function in the same way as a real physical player, which is, the setting will stay as it was as long as we didn’t change it.
The two issues that are too harsh are:

Issue 1: QuickTime lacks its own help facility
The author thinks that the software doesn’t come with its own help facility is shameful. He suggested online help should be considered an adjunct to local help facility since in order to use this online help, users will have to learn the navigation of Apple’s website and dependent on their internet connection.

The principle violated is “inadequate help”. However, according to Neilson, every time you add a feature to a system, there is one more thing for users to learn. Two helpers functions not only is a duplicating effort but it also increases the chances to confuse its users. The principle followed here is “less is more”. And don’t forget a tradeoff of incorporating help facility in the software is increasing in its file size.

Issue 2: Cannot change the color appearance of the interface.

The ‘omnipresent player window’ ignores the user's preferred color settings, and does not provide a means for the user to specify his or her preferences (for colors).

The principle violated is “doesn’t produce subjective satisfaction”. It is frustrating to users that if they have their own preference of colors and they cannot make changes to the default appearance. However, this violation is justified by the principle of “consistency”. Since the consistency of the “look and feel” of a product is important, especially for QuickTime Player which has been in the market for a period of time. It affords recognition (e.g. red and yellow for McDonald). On the other hand, “The designers did in fact adopt the user's color preferences for the transient secondary dialogs, but not for the omnipresent player window.”

Since at the omnipresent window of the player, the feedback to users on whether a button is active or inactive is through colors change, thus changing the color settings might affect this interaction.