Noodler Interface Redesign

Feedback from Focus Group

A number of small focus groups were carried out in order to identify and further examine any issues that may have been missed during earlier analyses of the app Noodler. Note that a live version of the application is not currently available and so screenshots were used when carrying out these focus groups. Transcripts may be found in Appendix A.

One of the most striking findings from the focus group was that many users were unable to identify what purpose the app may serve based on its name. As predicted in the previous report, a number of users mistakenly thought it was a food or art app. "Noodler" and noodling are terms which are most likely only familiar to those who have a certain amount of experience playing music. Based on this feedback, the need for a logo which clearly communicates the function and personality of Noodler became even more apparent than it previously was.

The appearance of the homepage was generally very well received by the focus group. However, when asked to locate a certain band, most did encounter trouble. This was likely due to the fact that album artwork was not accompanied by tags or titles.

The "Create" page was not met with the same kind of positive feedback as the homepage. Users took issue with a number of aspects here including colour scheme and alignment of elements (e.g. "It's seems a little bit all over the place"). Most users also had some minor difficulties when asked to locate the "Save Tab" button offering further justification for enlarging this element.

Modifications

1. Logo

The first modification that was made to the app was the implementation of a logo. Previously the closest thing that Noodler had to a logo was the name "Noodler" in a decorative font. However, the feedback from the focus group made it quite apparent that many people weren't entirely sure of what to expect from an app called Noodler and so a logo which clearly communicated the apps functionality was a necessary addition. Furthermore, Whan Park, Eisingerich, Pol and Whan Park (2013) found that logos containing images are more effective at providing self-identity benefits than those made up purely of words. For these reasons, an image-based logo was designed and implemented. The new logo is relatively simple, depicting a plectrum icon against a backdrop of guitar strings.

Figure 1. New Noodler Logo

2. Colour Scheme

Originally, Noodler had an incredibly inconsistent colour scheme. The page with the most problems in this regard was undoubtedly the "Create" page (as demonstrated in Figure.2).

A blue-centric colour scheme was selected for the updated version of Noodler because (as stated in the previous report) O'Connor (2009) has found that people tend to be more productive when surrounded by the colour blue. This could prove to be quite helpful when learning how to play the guitar or creating tablature.

Aside from the very clear changes that were made to the "Create" page, the Homepage also underwent minor modifications including the addition of a subtle blue overlay. This uniform colour scheme helps to create a more consistent looking app overall. The importance of consistency has been outlined in Nielsen's Usability Heuristics (1995) and echoed by other researchers in later work (e.g. Mandel, 1997).
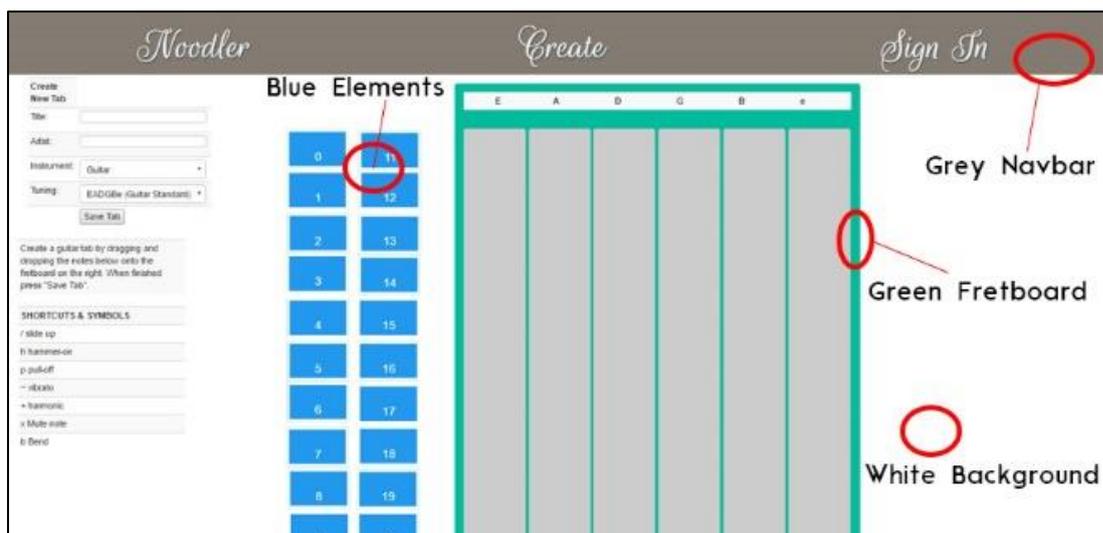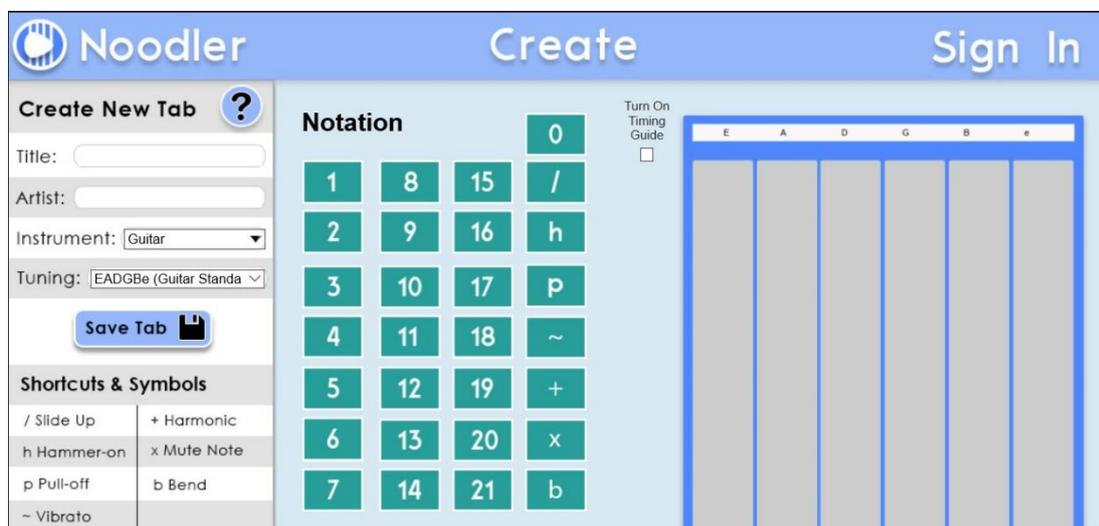
Figure 2. Original "Create" Page

Figure 3. Updated "Create" Page

3. Font and Text Size

A standout feature of Noodler's original design was the decorative, handwritten font used in the navigation bar. While this was unique and interesting, it was somewhat difficult to read and inconsistent with the rest of the app. Usability.gov (n.d.) emphasizes the importance of using a font that increases scanability, legibility and readability. The original font was, therefore, replaced with the very clear Modern Sans.

Figure 4. Updated Navigation Bar

The sidebar of the "Create" page also had issues in terms of readability. In this case, however, font size (rather than font style) was the problem. This sidebar underwent a number of changes (some of which will be discussed later) but perhaps one of the most notable is the increase in font size.

Figure 5. Original and Updated Sidebar Comparison

In his seminal book on web usability "Don't Make Me Think", Steve Krug (2006) writes about the "Trunk Test". Essentially this refers to an exercise in which a person squints their eyes (or otherwise blurs their vision) and views a webpage. Ideally, a user should still be able to identify the important elements of a webpage with their vision blurred. The updated version of the sidebar would clearly be much more likely to pass the "Trunk Test".

4. Iconography

In the previous report, it was proposed that more iconography should be implemented into the app. In the final redesign, however, iconography was used somewhat sparingly. As mentioned earlier, participants of the focus groups had some difficulty in locating the "Save Tab" button. An icon was added here in order to help increase size and visibility.
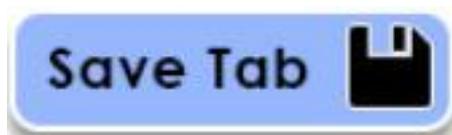

Figure 6. Updated Save Tab Button

The question mark icon found in the sidebar gives users access to the instructions which were previously ever-present. Concealing these instructions created more space in the sidebar and allowed for the very necessary enlargement of text and elements.

5. New Features (Timing Grid, Overlays)

Aside from the aesthetic and usability changes that were made to Noodler, a number of new features and functionalities were also added. In its original form, the app offered no way of denoting rhythmic notation. Many people simply choose not to include rhythm when

writing tabs, however others prefer to provide some form of rhythmic guide. Nielsen's Usability Heuristics also outline the importance of offering user control and freedom. For these reasons, an optional "Timing Grid" was added which can be toggled on and off through a simple checkbox.
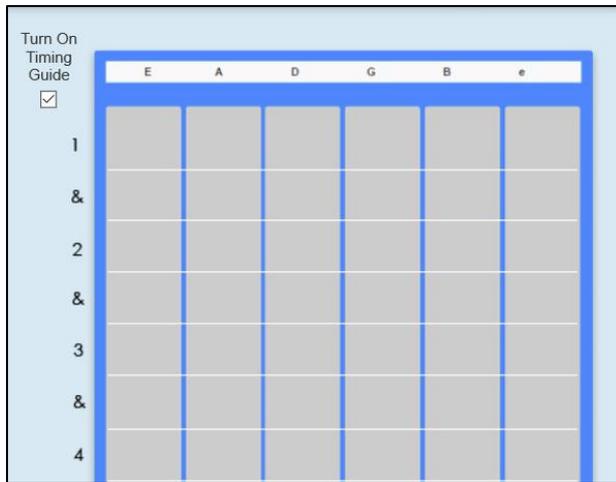

Figure 7. Timing Grid

Additionally, user testing revealed that many people had problems identifying certain artists or songs on the homepage as no artist or song titles are displayed on or near some of the album cover images. This problem was also discussed briefly at an earlier informal meeting with the developers of Noodler. The homepage was, however, judged to be aesthetically pleasing and adding titles to each image could have interfered with its clean, minimalist appearance. In order to avoid this, titles were added as a slightly hidden feature which become visible when a user is hovering over a certain image.

Figure 8. Song Title and Artist

What I Have Learned

Undertaking this project had massive benefits for me. I developed a number of practical skills which I hope I can utilise in future employment. For example, even though I had already experienced working with Axure I learned how to implement a multitude of new interactions (e.g. Creating drag-and-drop elements, Adding a scrollbar). Assets were edited and created using Photoshop and a short demo of the prototype was recorded using Camtasia. Aside from this software experience, I also had the chance to create paper prototypes and carry out a research in the form of interviews and focus groups. I also learned a great deal about working with developers. I found during the interview stage of my research that very little time had been devoted to design considerations in the development of Noodler. It was apparent that the user experience had not really been taken into consideration. This helped to clarify in my mind what exactly the role of a UX designer is. Of all the projects that I have completed to date, this one required me to draw on the widest range of both soft and hard skills.

References

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Appendix

Focus Group Transcripts

Questions

Q1. What kind of app do you imagine when you hear the name Noodler?

Showing Homepage

Q2. What are your first impressions of this homepage?

Q3. Can you please point to The Mars Volta?

Showing Create Page

Q4. What are your first impressions of this page's appearance?

Q5. Please show me where you would save your work

Q6. Please comment on the navigation menu font

User 1

Q1. I don't know to be honest. Maybe an art app or something.

Q2. I like it. Very well designed.

Q3. *User could not identify*

Q4. Don't like it as much as the last one. It seems a little bit all over the place. Doesn't really look finished.

Q5. *User found "Save Tab" button fairly quickly*

Q6. I think it's pretty nice. It's kind of unique.

User 2

Q1. Either a game or a drawing thing probably.

Q2. Really nice layout. It looks quite modern and slick.

Q3. *User could not identify*

Q4. It's not bad but it doesn't really look like the same app as the last page.

Q5. *User found "Save Tab" button after a bit of searching*

Q6. Looks alright but not very app-y if you know what I mean.

User 3

Q1. Possibly a recipe app.

Q2. Looks good. I like the images. It's kind of artsy.

Q3. *User could not identify*

Q4. Not really as nice as the first page. It's very plain.

Q5. *User found "Save Tab" button fairly quickly*

Q6. It goes well with the first page but not really the second.

User 4

Q1. Sounds like doodler so I would guess that it's an art app.

Q2. All the music imagery is pretty cool.

**Q3. ***User could not identify*

Q4. Boring

Q5. *User found "Save Tab" button after a minute*

Q6. It's nice but it could be clearer.

User 5

Q1. It makes me think of doodling and drawing.

Q2. It looks like a music thing, maybe for downloading music or something.

**Q3. ***User could not identify*

Q4. It's pretty boring. Wouldn't interest me.

Q5. *User found "Save Tab" button after a minute*

Q6. I think if it was bold it would be better. The design is kind of nice but it should be stronger.

User 6

Q1. A food app. Something like Just-Eat

Q2. Quite good.

Q3. *User could not identify*

Q4. It's blank. Seems to represent a guitar fretboard.

Q5. *User found "Save Tab" button after a minute*

Q6. Quite attractive.

User 7

Q1. I think of students. I think of noodles.

Q2. It looks professional and easy to use.

Q3. *User identified correctly*

Q4. It looks great.

Q5. *User found "Save Tab" button almost instantly*

Q6. I actually quite like the font.

User 8

Q1. I haven't got a clue, sorry.

Q2. Very music-y. Quite nice looking.

Q3. *User could not identify*

Q4. I don't really like it that much.

Q5. *User found "Save Tab" button after a minute*

Q6. Fancy and suits the app well.

User 9

Q1. Some kind of app about Noodles.

Q2. I don't know what's going on really. Not very intuitive.

Q3. *User could not identify*

Q4. That's terrible. It feels funny. Doesn't have the same look and feel at all.

Q5. *User found "Save Tab" button almost instantly*

Q6. That's bad. I don't think certain people would understand it. I'd use something clearer.

User 10

Q1. At a guess, I'd say a cooking app.

Q2. Looks like it's probably very easy to use. Not too much going on.

Q3. *User could not identify*

Q4. I wouldn't say that's as nice as the last page. Kind of boring to look at.

Q5. *User found "Save Tab" button after a minute*

Q6. Looks fine.