THE
GLASS WALL
THE HOMEPAGE
REDESIGN 2002

Introduction

In setting out to redesign the BBCi homepage we knew we were tackling a hard task. Many people use and love our homepage, so we know that any changes we make will evoke a strong reaction. We needed to balance the needs of these users with the needs of our own business. We needed to satisfy a large number of people with a range of different objectives, both inside and outside the BBC. Any solution requires us to make decisions, but we believe that we have at least made informed choices to ensure a sensitive evolution of the page.

We wanted to make a clear step change with the design of the page without alienating the users. To begin with we looked at the way people use the current page using click-throughs and the way they feel about it through emotional response testing. We looked at how people build up relationships with the services and objects they use on a daily basis. This helped us address the issues we saw in all elements of the homepage, including the main story. Throughout the process, we benefited from continual user testing and internal feedback.

We believe that the resulting page will feel familiar to our existing users, but through digital patina, balanced design and excellent functionality, we also believe we have given it soul.

The Glass Wall which gave us the title of this book was the centre of the project. Most of our discussions were visualised on the wall and its location at the entrance to the studio ensured everyone could see what was going on and contribute.

This book aims to give some background on the process we followed and covers the redesign from its early stages in May 2002 up until launch in November 2002.

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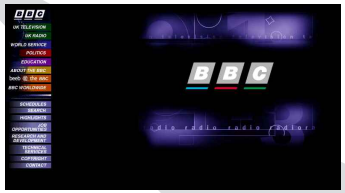
BBCi history

The history

The BBC homepage has been through three major changes in its life, most recently the launch of BBCi in November 2001. Along the way it has seen many ideas and concepts for new brands and radical layouts.

The early years of BBC Online up to 1997



Launched in 1998

Diversion

Diversions

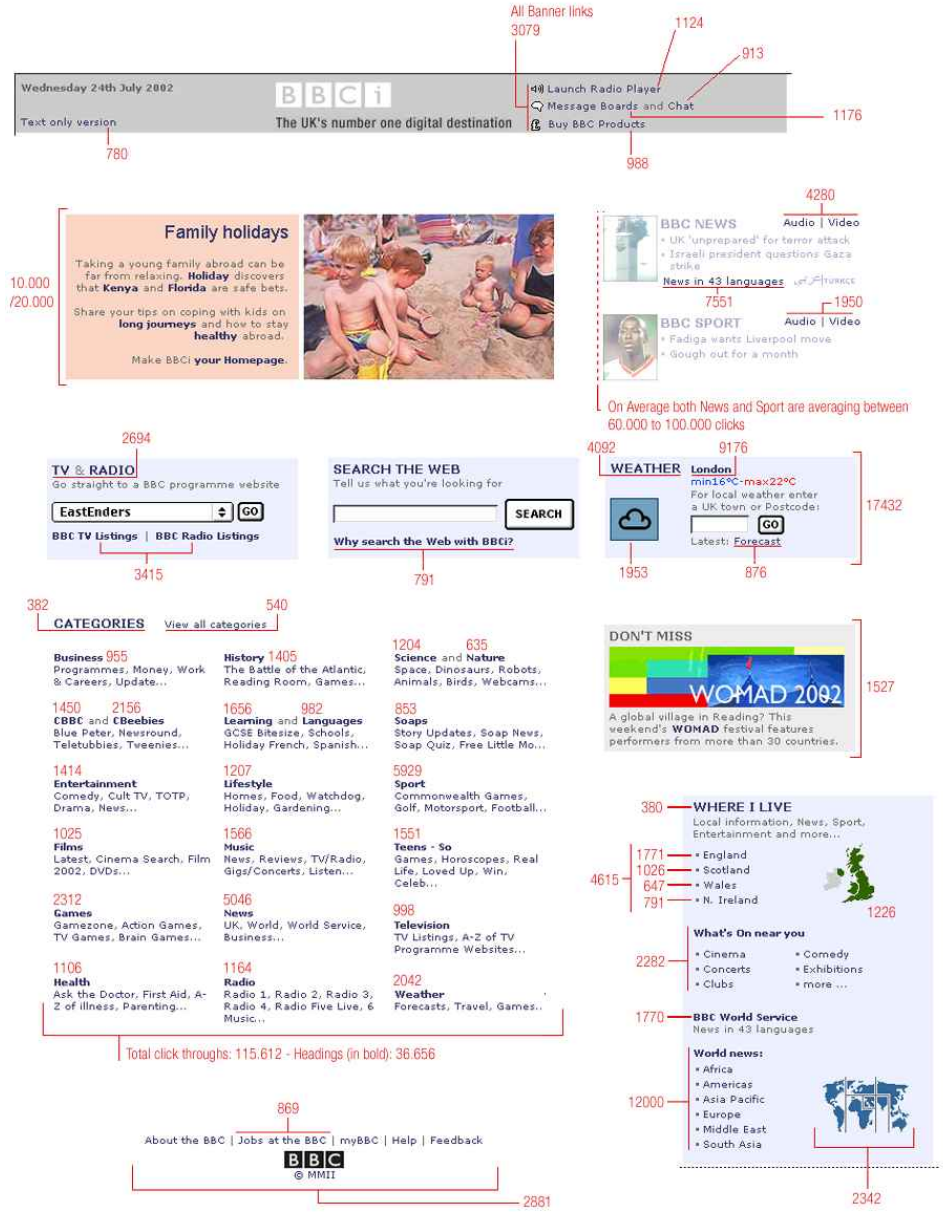
Run up to 2001 relaunch

One of many iterations of a new design

One of many iterations of a new design

The ‘new look’ launched autumn 2001

BBCi individual clickthroughs - Sun 23rd June



Objectives for the redesign - August 2002

Homepage objectives

· To be the starting point for users when they log onto the web.
· To be a place where we connect to our audiences.
· To be an easy, trusted and fast way for users to get to what they're looking for.
· To get people to set www.bbc.co.uk as their homepage.

Areas needing attention

The categories list may not be the best we can do.
Action: re-examine what goes here and how it appears.

The search box was not originally part of the page design and was added later.
Action: reconsider its position in relation to the page elements around it.

When the search box was added, Communicate lost its dedicated space.
Action: reinstate a dedicated space.

The pulldown under the TV and RADIO box is too long - usability issue.
Action: look for another solution.

The panel called Where I Live does not support the functionality that is planned for this area.
Action: rethink this area.

Other objectives

· The November 2001 redesign created a new look and a new design voice that has filtered through to other areas of the site and been further developed (e.g. Lifestyles and Nature). If the homepage is to remain consistent and coherent it needs to catch up.

· Some design changes are needed to inject a little more 'soul' into the page.

All the above points mean that a significant proportion of the page needs attention. It would make sense to reconsider the page as a whole.

Understanding phase

Understanding phase

Emotional response testing

A little more soul

"***Everybody expresses far more than he understands.***" **Marshall McLuhan**

One of the aims of the 2002 homepage redesign was to inject a little more 'soul' into the page. This idea emerged from feedback about the 2001 homepage which was labelled functional but perhaps a little clinical in look and feel.

In order to do this we wanted to go beyond function and pursue the emotional, expressive, suggestive and engaging aspects of the user experience, possibly something beyond visual aesthetics and brand.

There are many reasons why people love a website apart from how it looks. We wanted to find out whether individuals like, love, hate or were indifferent to our homepage and why.

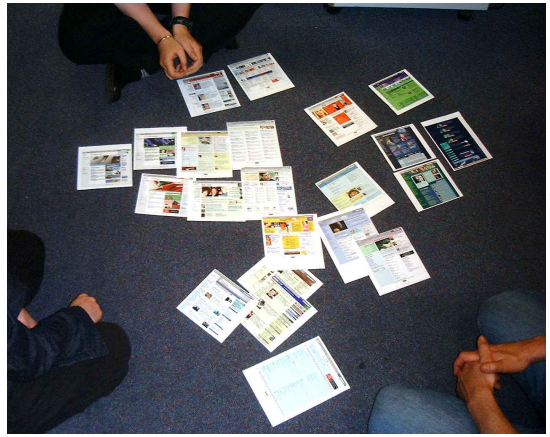
Ultimately, we wanted to identify things to guide us in designing something to which people might say - "*I love this homepage!*"

Talking to users

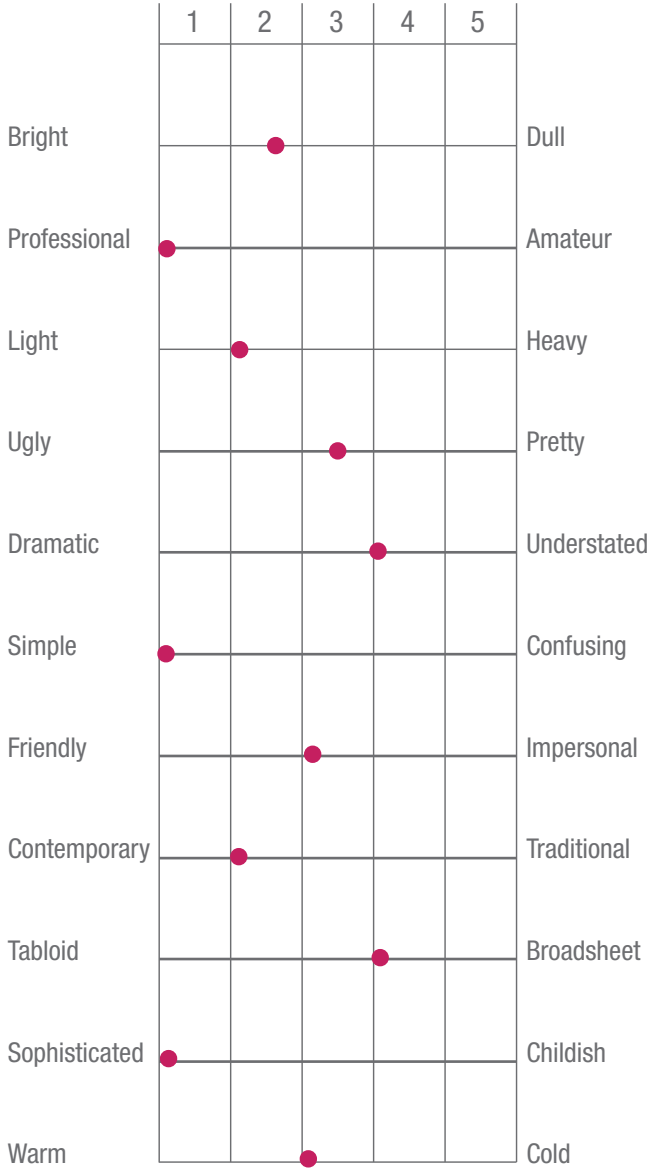
Our findings were based upon the experiences of eight users interacting and exploring the current BBCi homepage in one-on-one sessions with our designers.

First a warm-up exercise looked at participants' visual awareness and preferences using existing BBCi web pages. These were chosen from sections around the site such as Food and Entertainment. Participants were asked to group together paper screenshots of these on the floor. Some of these designs follow a visual style and language (for example, the Lifestyles pages) whilst others are more individual in their presentation. This exercise gave an indication that participants recognised a ‘family’ of design styles. What also came out clearly was the visual impact of high quality photographic imagery as a focus of attention, such as those used in th BBC One and Lifestyle pages.

Direct comparisons between the current BBCi homepage and seven other homepages including participants' own personal favourites. Their emotional responses and reactions were observed, along with their moods, desires and feelings. They were also asked questions such as - "What was your first impression when you saw this homepage?". Whilst looking at the pages they also scored their response against our bi-polar emotional response scale of eleven word pairs: bright/dull; professional/amateur; light/heavy; ugly/pretty; dramatic/understated etc. This gave an interesting additional quantifiable measure of emotional experience.



BBCi homepage -
Bipolar emotional response tests



The theory

Measuring human emotional response is tricky. How do we know whether interaction with our website will result in the experience intended? What kind of information or inspiration do designers need and how do we get it?

In the example here users were asked to plot their response to an individual homepage using dots. When the responses from all the users were put together they created the patterns shown on the next page.

What we found

Patterns and shapes can be seen when the emotional response test data is presented graphically.

When people's test scores are grouped by site, users' personal favourites and the BBCi homepage look very similar. Patterns for scores from the other sites varied a lot more in their shape.

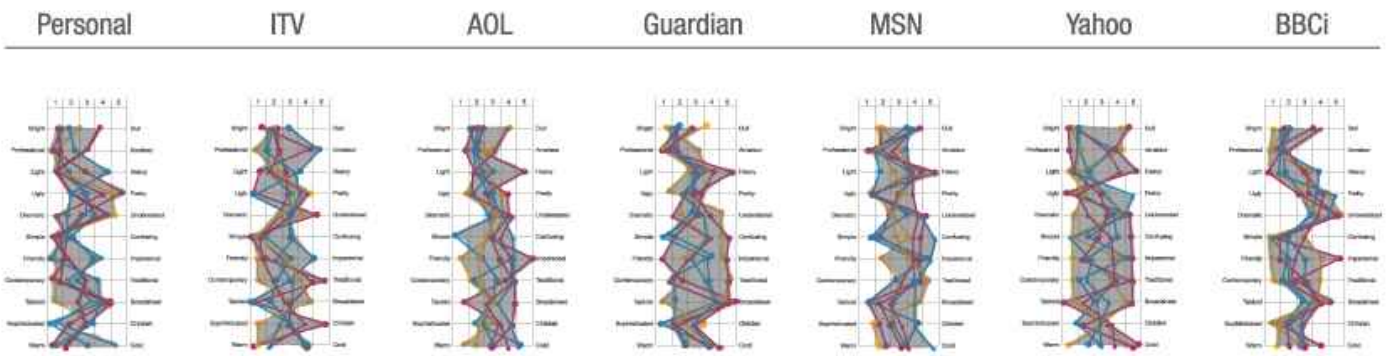
Some were thinner and straight with scores concentrated down the median, such as AOL and MSN. We interpret this as an indifference to the visual design. However, people may still like a site based on its functionality and what it does for them rather than how it looks.

Some sites showed more extreme and varied emotional response scores e.g. Yahoo shows a particularly fat even shape. This indicates a strong reaction that is inconsistent between people. Their views vary and the way they feel about the look is very different.

From this work we believe that we can guage in a useful way reactions to visual design to aid the design process.

BBCi homepage -

Average of weeks 1-3 semantic, differential, bipolar, emotional response tests



Understanding phase

Voice mapping

Voice mapping

Voice mapping allowed us to look at the design, visual language and brand voice within the space BBCi occupies among its direct and indirect competitors. The result is a visual representation of our product's environment and is a great way of seeing how design and visual language can mould and position our own product through comparison with others.

In the exercise shown on the next page, the design team chose two pairs of words and placed them on the vertical and horizontal axes. The words were chosen very carefully in order to help us understand the message we are sending our users. We plotted a range of other sites on the same scale in order to compare the various messages.

We found that our existing page sits alone in a part of the voice map that is fairly devoid of character and colour. This confirmed our thoughts that our page needed more soul, more individuality.

BBCi homepage

Voice mapping über map

Understanding phase

Personas

Homepage design - an introduction to personas

Why use personas?

A persona is a user archetype that we can use to help guide decisions about a product's visual design, features, navigation and interactions. By designing for an archetype - whose goals and behaviour patterns we understand - we can satisfy the broader group of people represented by that archetype. Our personas are based on the BBCi target audience as defined by Audience Research non-trialists as well as our existing user base.

Personas:

- are fictitious people for whom we are designing
- represent the archetypal qualities of our audience
- provide a focus for design, thereby humanising the design process
- are tools for thinking about features and functions.

Personas were developed in daily workshops and captured in brief descriptions that include behaviour patterns, goals, skills, attitudes net usage and environment, with a few fictional personal details to bring the persona to life. Associated mood boards were also made.

From the personas developed, we have identified a 'primary persona', the archetype, a persona whom, if satisfied, means others will more likely be satisfied. Our final personas are summarised in a table.

Reference:

This approach to the development and use of personas closely follows the method advocated by Alan Cooper in his book "The Inmates are running the Asylum".

BBCi personas - Mandy Daniels

36 years old, Mousy blonde (treats herself to highlights), 5'4", medium/mum build – goes to the gym. Lives in Northampton with her partner Rob and their two sons, Jason and Liam. Rob drives a delivery van and Mandy is a part-time supervisor at Asda. They enjoy nights out at the pub (where Rob is a member of the quiz team) and watching TV - Mandy prefers Eastenders while Rob likes any sport and Channel 5 crime documentaries. She's really into DIY. They don't get holidays abroad every year so they're saving hard for a family trip to Florida where Mandy and Rob also hope to get married.

TV
Eastenders and other soaps, Cutting It, Holiday, Watchdog. Has applied to be on Changing Rooms several times.

Reads
The Sun, Good Food Magazine, TV Quick

Internet usage
Doesn't get much time to use it but when she does, it's often in the early afternoon, before the kids get home from school. She uses AOL to send emails to her sister and has recently started buying books for her kids from Amazon. Mandy could live without the internet. She can't really see what all the fuss is about. Some afternoons she uses AOL's recipe finder and she has tried the home improvement service, although she prefers magazines for the latter. Rob tends to dominate the internet in the evenings, when he visits the Northampton Town FC website. He has also used the interactive football service on Sky Sports Active and now the BBC's FA Cup Service.

BBCi personas - Derek Jones

39 years old, scruffy brown hair, moustache, reasonably fit but with and a bit of a beer belly.
He has a wife (Dawn) two kids (aged 12 and 15).
He works as a self-employed electrician in Cardiff and goes to the pub three nights a week.
His kids mean that he doesn't get a look-in on the internet very often.
He logs on four or five times a month, for about half an hour per session.
Derek is currently tracing his family tree and this is the main thing he uses the internet for.

TV

Sky Sports and News, ITN News at Ten, films, Channel 5 police chase documentaries.
Uses Teletext to check football and rugby scores, so doesn't visit news or sports websites.

Technology

He has a mobile phone with a separate ring tone for business calls.
Has a Sky set-top-box but doesn't often get to watch it as his kids dominate their main TV (has to choose from the terrestrial channels on a portable TV in the kitchen instead).

Internet usage

He has an email address - provided by his ISP, Freeserve - which he now includes in his Yellow Pages advert.
Recently visited the 1901 Census website (heard about it from a friend).
He's never visited a chat room or sent an instant message but he knows his 12-year-old daughter does both, and it worries him.
His kids print off any emails he receives as they are online every day.
Last summer he found a cheap flight to Turkey through Expedia.co.uk, having followed a link from MSN, which his son has set as their homepage.
MSN 'is' the internet, as far as Derek is concerned.
He uses the search box to find what he wants, although he knows the URL of sites such as familytreesearcher.com and multimap.co.uk.
Sometimes a story on the front of MSN will catch his eye and he'll click on it.

Personas

This is a summary of all our key personnas.

Name	Steven Annis	Richard Evans	Rosy Sykes
Age	20	45	66
Location	Hull	Wolverhampton	Aberdeen
Occupation	Student (HND) Has part time job	Owner of Computer Support Company	Retired, widowed, volunteer worker
Desc/level	Used for essays and research at Uni. Games, Music and surfing at home. Has the Kingston Broadband service (ITV). Intermediate/expert PC user.	PC home/work. PDA (ipaq) Loves technology. Has DSat. Expert.	Mainly email occasional web usage, son's old computer in spare bedroom BT Openworld. Basic / novice
ITV usage	Uses quizzes such as Test the Nation and Digital Text and Walking with Beasts Interactive.	Uses the Sky Sport, News Interactive, F1 Racing	NONE
Internet usage	Medium, couple of hours a day usage. Mailing, IM/ICQ and web for research in to interests and degree. Freeserve, Google, Amazon, Fan Sites, Listings, Cinema, Games & Porn.	Constant usage, broadband at home and work. Heavy email use, email newsletters, gofly.com, Sainsburys.co.uk, stock and shares ticker, Amazon, car sites. Uses internet as daily life tool.	One hour a week to email son in Korea. Has used Radio 4 site to email programmes and .gov sites for local issues. 1901 Census from newspaper story
BBC ITV usage	Did the national IQ test, uses the local Hull News section and some of the Blue Ocean	Uses all the FA Cup and Rugby multi-screen looking forward to the Wimbledon. Uses News Interactive.	NONE
BBC website usage	BBCi: H2G2. Message Boards *not* chat, cult buffy, doctor who, star trek. Student issues. Used to use Bitesize and Education services while doing GCSE's	News (his homepage) and sport, just discovered BBCi search - likes it. BBCi house buying mortgage, Motoring, Watchdog, Weather.	Radio 4 and Gardening.
Trigger	He has seen a promo for message boards at the end of Buffy and wants to chat all things Buffy. But only used once for the chance to win videos. Saw the trailers for Test the Nation or generally try pressing the RED key.	Picks up URL trails after Top Gear, triggers mostly Lifestyle and Business related.	From trailers on BBC2 and Radio 4, BBC Gardening Magazine and Radio Times.
Ultimate goal	Look knowledgeable and interesting to his friends	Be in control of life and business, efficiency	To still be an active member of society

		PRIMARY PERSONA	SECONDARY PERSONA	
Name	Jonty Hudson	Mandy Daniels	Derek Jones	Jessica Barnesworth
Age	7	36	39	13
Location	Bristol	Northhampton	Cardiff	Penzance
Occupation	Primary school pupil	Part time supervisor at Asda	Self employed electrician	Secondry school pupil
Desc/level	PC at school but not at home Fox Kids, Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network, Sky Sport Interactive. Intermediate.	Stressed, time poor, she's focused on her Internet usage when she does use it...it's her time. Uses AOL on a PC. Has DCable. Novice.	PC in spare bedroom, uses it for work and needs peace. Intermediate. Freeserve. Has DSat. Novice.	PC at school and at home in the spare 'box' room. Good Intermediate
ITV usage	MTV Base and Playjam	Has been in the Walled Garden but not really a great user. Has looked up games and Educational sites for the children.	Watches Sky movies and some sport	NONE
Net usage	NONE	Regular, but low time spent - time poor, often early afternoon. Goal orientated communications, parenting issues, educational issues, consumer affairs, holiday info, entertainment and DIY...Amazon	Occasional email for biz, task focused, flights, census, Multimap for work. (Only get news and sport from TV)	More during term time for IM'ing friends and even more so in winter. Chatrooms, Love @ Lycos.
BBC ITV usage	NONE	Uses GCSE Bitesize with her kids. Uses the local listings and the travel section.	All Sport that's interactive and News	NONE
BBC website usage	NONE	Eastenders, Holiday, Watchdog. Not regular user of any.	NONE YET	Eastenders, So... site, messageboards and Radio 1.
Trigger	Main source of influence is his brothers. Brother's friend comes back from USA with new pair of Nike trainers so wants to look at the Nike site.	TV promos mentioned during the programme and perhaps word of mouth from other parents and banner ads from within AOL advertised in the DCable monthly subscription magazine.	N/A (search might bring him) Press the RED key and some trailers.	Trailers at the end of Eastenders and on Radio 1. Found So... through word of mouth. Enters all the comps.
Ultimate goal	To be like his brothers	Look after welfare of the family	No nonsense, after an easy life	To flirt with boys and be popular

Understanding phase

Mood boards

Mandy's mood board

Mood boards

Mood boards are a very basic but highly effective tool. They work as an extension of personas, creating an immediate, understandable, visual reference for each one. In this capacity they allow people who have not been involved in the persona development process to get a flavour of them without having to read through all the details.

The boards are created from magazine cuttings selected to represent the persona's interests, lifestyles and media consumption. These images range from pictures of the clothes they wear, the house they live in, the type of programmes they watch to the type of mobile phone they use. Mandy's board for example contains images of packed lunches (for her kids), a Ford focus, sensible clothes, a common Nokia phone, celebrity gossip, and a Bridget Jones's diary film poster.

Whilst the boards are a fairly crude tool they can be instrumental in turning a paper-thin persona into a well-rounded character with greater depth and texture than words alone can provide.

Derek’s mood board

Concept phase

2 Questions

To instigate the concept phase of the project we asked ourselves two questions:

Question 1 What do you do when you arrive somewhere new?

With this question we took the metaphor of travel as a starting point for our concept work. For users like persona Mandy the Internet is still a relatively unfamiliar environment, and the BBCi homepage is entirely new. So in the same way that when you travel to a new location in the world there are things that you need to help you get around, equally there must be similar things which would help you through your journey on the web.

Question 2 What could the homepage be?

To answer this question we broke it down into three sub-questions and then brainstormed each with a large group of design, technical and editorial team members.

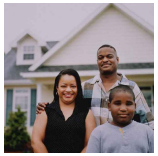
The three sub-questions were:

· What is the BBCi homepage's voice?
· How can we serve people with the BBCi homepage?
· What experience do you want to get from BBCi?

Question 1

What do you do when you arrive somewhere new?

BOAT
BUS
WALK
TRAIN
PLANE
COMFORT
SIGNS
PICTURES
GET SICK
PLACE TO STAY
HELP/ASSIST
PHRASEBOOK
TOOLS
WHAT'S THERE TO HELP ME?
SAFE
SAFETY
WHAT PROTECTS ME?
CHAT TO LOCALS
KIT
WHAT DO I NEED WITH ME?
GUIDE BOOK
FIND SOMEONE YOU KNOW
FIND A BASE
CHAT TO TRAVELLERS
MAKE A PLAN WHERE/WHAT NEXT
WORD OF MOUTH
MAP
SHOWER
PHONE/MAIL HOME
SMS
EMBASSY
SERVICES
HOSPITAL/ MEDICAL
BUSINESS
PLEASURE
ETTIQUETTE
TOURIST INFO
CAMERA
FIRST AID
FIND SOMEONE U DON'T KNOW!
POLICE
WHERE CAN I GO FOR HELP?
VISITING FAMILY
TRANSLATION
ACTIVITIES
WHAT CAN I DO?
POSTCARDS
REFLECTION ON TRIP
PERSONAL NOTEBOOK
LOCAL KNOWLEDGE
SOUVENIRS
FOOD
What do you remember?
DID YOU TAKE?
What's the emotional reaction?
PICTURES
Ready 2 DO SOMETHING
Web Cafe
Ready 2 DO SOMETHING
SIGHTSEE
WOULD YOU GO AGAIN?
HOW WAS THE TRIP?
PHONE
CAP - Sun protection
BIN!
D
2002 06 19



경 찰
POLICE

TESSIN

TOURIST
INFORMATION

Question 2

What could the page be?

REASSURING
SMILE
AUNTY VERA
TRUSTWORTHY
WISE
VOLUME CONTROL
QUIET
EXPRESSIVE
FAMILIAR
LOUD
JOHN PEEL
QUICK
CALM
CONCISE
NOT PATRONISING
OMNIPRESENT
RELAXING
STRONG
DEPENDABLE
EXCITABLE
PUBLIC SERVICE
CHATTY
WHISPER
CONSCIENTIOUS
APPROACHABLE
INSPIRING
SIMPLE
ACCURATE
WHAT IS THE BBCi HOMEPAGE'S
VOICE?
PERSONAL
TIME DEPENDENT
DRAMATIC
POETIC
CONSCIENCE
DIRECTING
CULTURAL SPECIFICITY
DIALECTS/ ACCENTS
GRAMMATICALLY CORRECT
DIFFERENT
(NOT) AUNTY
CONFIDENT
POLITICALLY CORRECT
DESCRIPTIVE
SHOUT
UPPER/ lower CASE
PAM AYERS
MINIMALISTIC
INFORMED
FRIENDLY
MODERN
EMOTICONS
IN TOUCH
TRADITIONAL
CELEBRATORY

FLASH SPLASH OF WHOLE OF BBCi (like an ad)

BBC EVENTS

SIGNS
- words
- pictures

ALPHABETICAL LIST OF EVERYTHING

ALL THE BBC BRAND LOGOS

SHELVES/ SUPERMARKET

A 'HUB' LIST GROUP

KIT

GAME

Smiley face

A GUIDE
- Taken by the hand

BIG PAGE OF KIT (buttons)

BBC Character
- From TV
- New

SCRAP BOOK

PHOTO GALLERY

STORY/ BOOK

ORIENTATE IT MY WAY

MAP

GAME

HOW CAN WE SERVE PEOPLE WITH THE BBCi HOMEPAGE?

LIBRARY

DOOR

"WHAT DO YOU WANT?"

LIFESTYLES

JUST SEARCH AND RESULTS

Big Search Box

SHOPPING BASKET

MOSAIC

CAR DASHBOARD

JOURNEY/ TOUR

CALL TO ARMS
- learn
- play
- find

ONE BIG PHONE NUMBER

CALENDER

CONTROL PANEL

DIARY
- of site
- of person

SIMPLE, CLEAR STATEMENT OF WHAT BBCi OFFERS

SUGGESTIONS FROM OTHER PEOPLE 'LIKE ME'

LIST OF THINGS TO DO

OUTLOOK BAR
- Directories

WHAT'S NEW?

STORAGE

Emerging themes

After our initial brainstorm ideas had been grouped, it became clear that they could further be bracketed into three overarching themes. These themes are ‘environment’, ‘conversation’ and ‘layers’. Each theme is explained in more detail on the following pages.

It is important to note that these themes are not mutually exclusive. As the project has progressed they have become more and more entwined both theoretically and visually. They are defined individually here to clarify the original directions our concept work took.

Environment

Conversation

Action - Response - Interuption

Confusion

SHOUTING
SHOUTING

Interuption

Environment

We broke ‘environment’ down into several sub themes.

· Structures - aerial views of cities/ floor plans/ grids/ maps.

· Networks and neighbourhoods – how things are connected and feed into each other.
People gravitating towards areas which relate to their existing behavioural patterns.

· Orientation – how you understand where you are and what you need to do.

· Comfort and safety – derived largely from the travel analogy. Massively important to Mandy-type users.

· Labelling/ signage – pictorial/linguistic importance in making things recognisable and familiar.

· Framing - the familiar can be exciting and new. You can take a microcosm of something
huge and it is given context and clarity.

Conversation

Rather than human-to-computer interaction we felt the page should reflect a human-to-human conversation. Human conversation involves interruptions, gestures, eye contact, turn-taking and exchange of ideas. Over time, this can create a level of intimacy allowing more and more information to be communicated in fewer and fewer words.

It was our intention to create a homepage which encouraged the conversation and relationship between the user and the homepage to grow over time, appealing to individual needs and interests.

Layers

Transluscent - Transparent
Light - Filters - Depth

Dawn - Dewy, Glistery
Dusk - Smokey
Midday - Bright, Sunshine
Nightime - Dark, Heavy, atmospheric

Areas/Environments
Dancefloor (Excitement, Energy, Movement)
Bar (Social, Chatting)
Restaurant (Eating, Nourishing, Social, Intimate)
Chillout (Relaxing, Mellow, Soft)
Library (Quiet, Educational, Organised, Calm)

Signs - Timetables

Intensity - Bathed in light - Reflection - Projection

Cool- Warm

Looking in - Lounge in someones home - Bar - Restaur
Looking out - City - Country - No view (brick wall)
Space - Cluttered - Inviting - Clinical

Dusk - Dawn - Smokey - Atmospheric - Raining - Foggy - Smoggy

Weather - Sunny - Rain - Foggy - Cloudy - Smoggy - Dappled sun - Snow

Layers and transparency

Ideas relating to ‘layers and transparency’ were instrumental in our early discussions and sparked our early visual development. They break down into two main sub-themes:

Transparency
· How can we make everything accessible?
· How can we present lots of information without bombarding or overwhelming users?

Layers
· Providing information at different depths in line with users’ needs.
· Enabling users to filter information either consciously or subconsciously.

We concluded that we wanted to find a middle ground between covert system adaptation (like ‘Amazon recommends’) and user manual choice (‘I want this, I want that’).

Mega themes

This diagram maps our ideas spacially. It's best viewed as a target or vortex with the stronger themes gravitating toward the centre.

A well-worn path

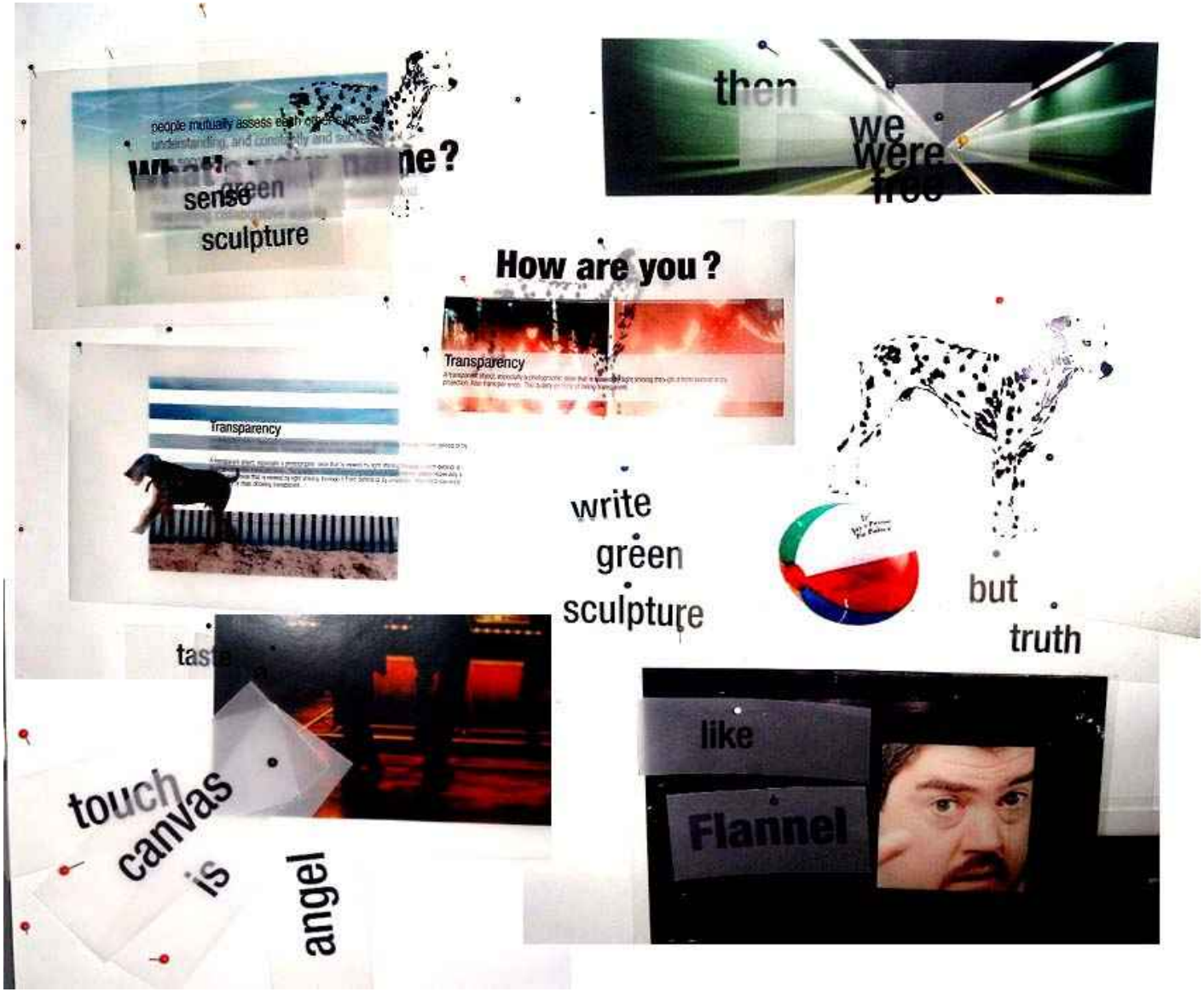
One of our objectives during the redesign was to create a page that people would feel comfortable with. We wanted to create a page where a user would feel at home and that they would adopt as his or her own homepage. It had to have character as well as appearing to respond to them. Or even mould itself around them...

Just like a pair of shoes really.

Come and play

A pin-board area made of cork was put up on the glass wall. Random images and words were printed on a variety of different papers (trace, white and acetate) and then pinned up with an open invitation to ‘come and play’. The idea behind it was to extend the theme of layers and transparency into a more literal, ‘hands-on’ experience.

The exercise allowed people to get involved with the project, and in the few weeks the board was up new combinations of images and text were constantly being created.



Concept Phase

Promo treatment - version 1

Promo development across BBCi

The visual language developed during the last homepage redesign has continued to evolve as it has filtered through the site's layers. These image-led areas serve a greater purpose than simply promoting the site content. With their visual weight and treatment they can create a stylistic/ thematic lead for the whole page. Effectively they are responsible for the immediate visual impact and tone the page emits, and as such are hugely important.

The examples shown here display some of the ways that the previous homepage's promo treatment has been used, adapted and improved to suit different sites. Particularly obvious elements in these examples are the bolder crops, depth of colours and segmented landscape formats. This type of stylistic evolution became a major lead for the initial visual development of the new homepage.

Promo development

For the homepage redesign we wanted to explore possible new promo treatments.

ARE YOU READY FOR 6MUSIC ?
We've got it all, from the best choons to the top DJ's
Watch DJ Bong on the plattez dat mattaz!
Make roolin' BBCi your HOMEPAGE

IN AT THE DEEPEND?

BBC1
The UK's number one digital destination

Promo development

Layered box promo storyboard

This storyboard demonstrates a treatment of multiple promos in one space. The promos are layered so that they are all visible but the user has to roll over them to bring them to the front (the actual promo was built in Director).

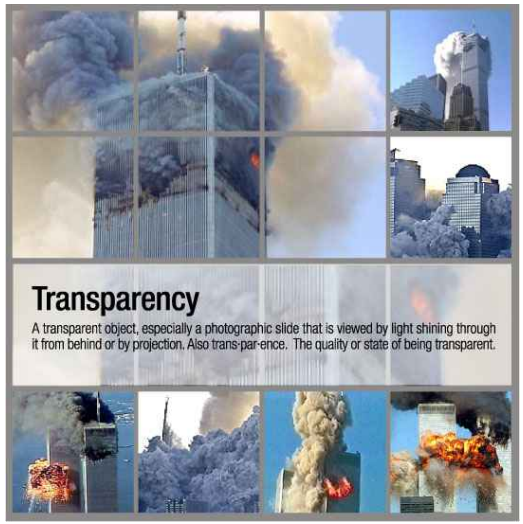
This treatment could be used on either multiple themes or multiple angles of one theme.

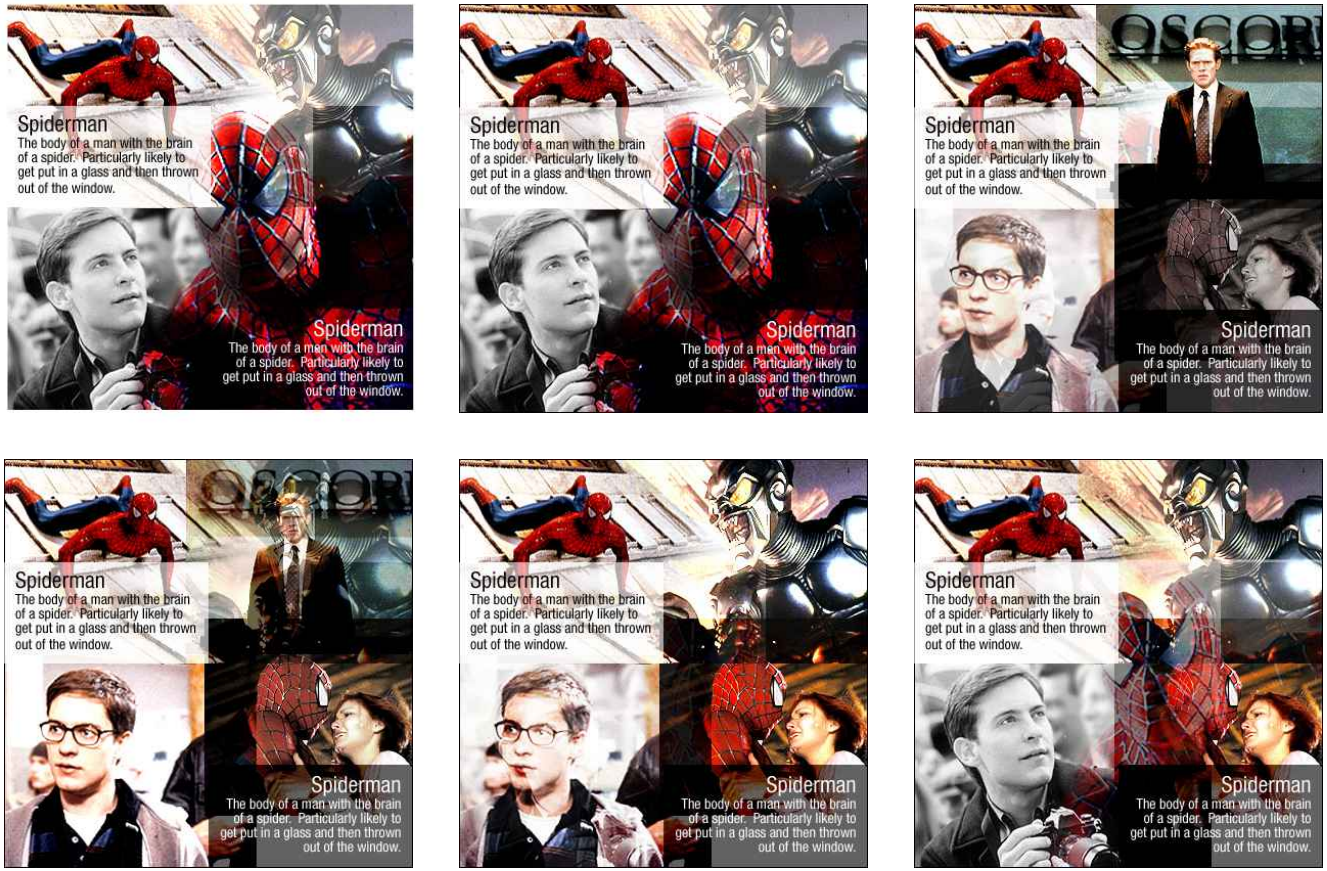
Promo development over time

We wanted to develop a promo treatment that could be used for events where the story has more than one angle, or one where more information gradually becomes available (a major breaking news story or an important sporting event, for example).

The grid design shown here allows content to be added gradually, resulting in a multi-faceted visual record of the event.

This is technically simple to implement because it is using static html but the resulting promo proved to be too heavy for daily use.





Themed promo storyboard

Another variation on a promo that develops over time was built in Director so that the layers gradually fade in and out. The subject could be any topic for which new content could be introduced as the day progressed.

In this example new pictures or reviews about ‘Spider-Man’ from around the site (e.g./films/radio1/Birmingham or /whatson) could be introduced. Different aspects of the theme could be explored from one site e.g. reviews, actor biogs, cast/crew interviews, listings etc.

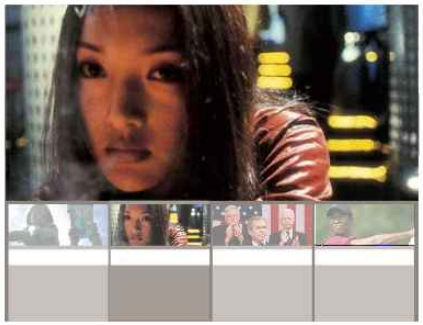
Multi promo

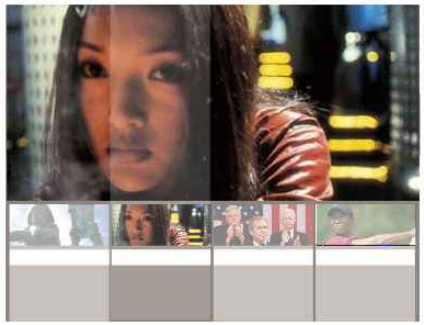
The promo box changes several times a day. This has the slight disadvantage that it is possible for people to see a promo they like and would like to return to later in the day, only to find that it has changed to a different one.

A design was developed where all four promos are exhibited all day, as a type of channel selector. The thumbnail images allow the user to navigate to the story of their choice.

Constructing the promo box in Flash allowed us to provide movement and layering of text and image. When the thumbnail image is clicked on it becomes the central feature with the associated text layered on top.

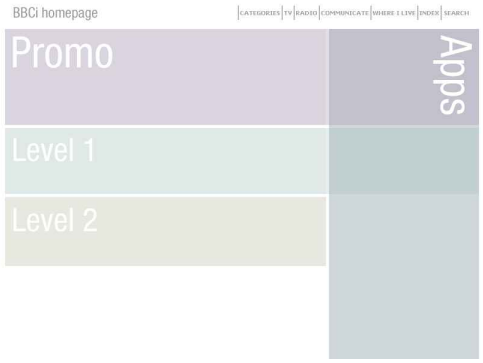
We've put this idea on hold because of implementation and maintenance issues.

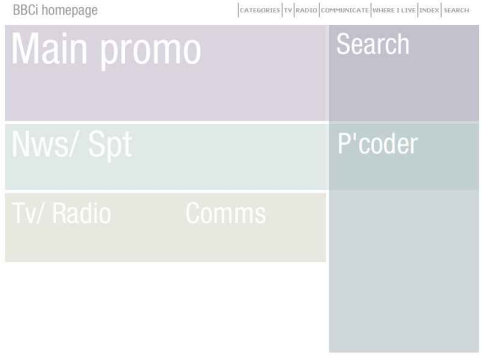


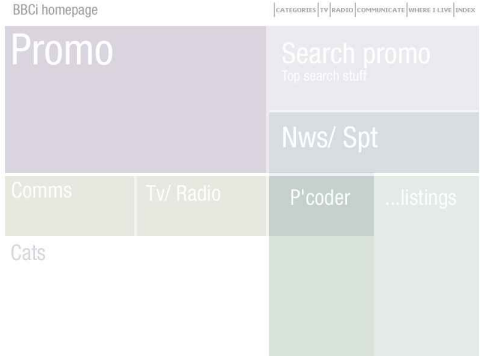


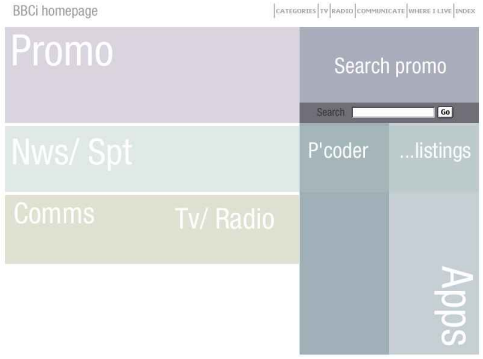
Concept phase

Structure treatment







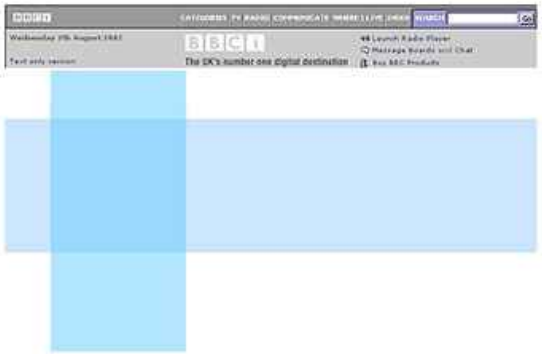


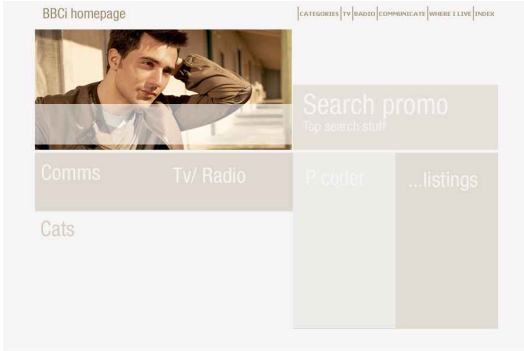
Structure

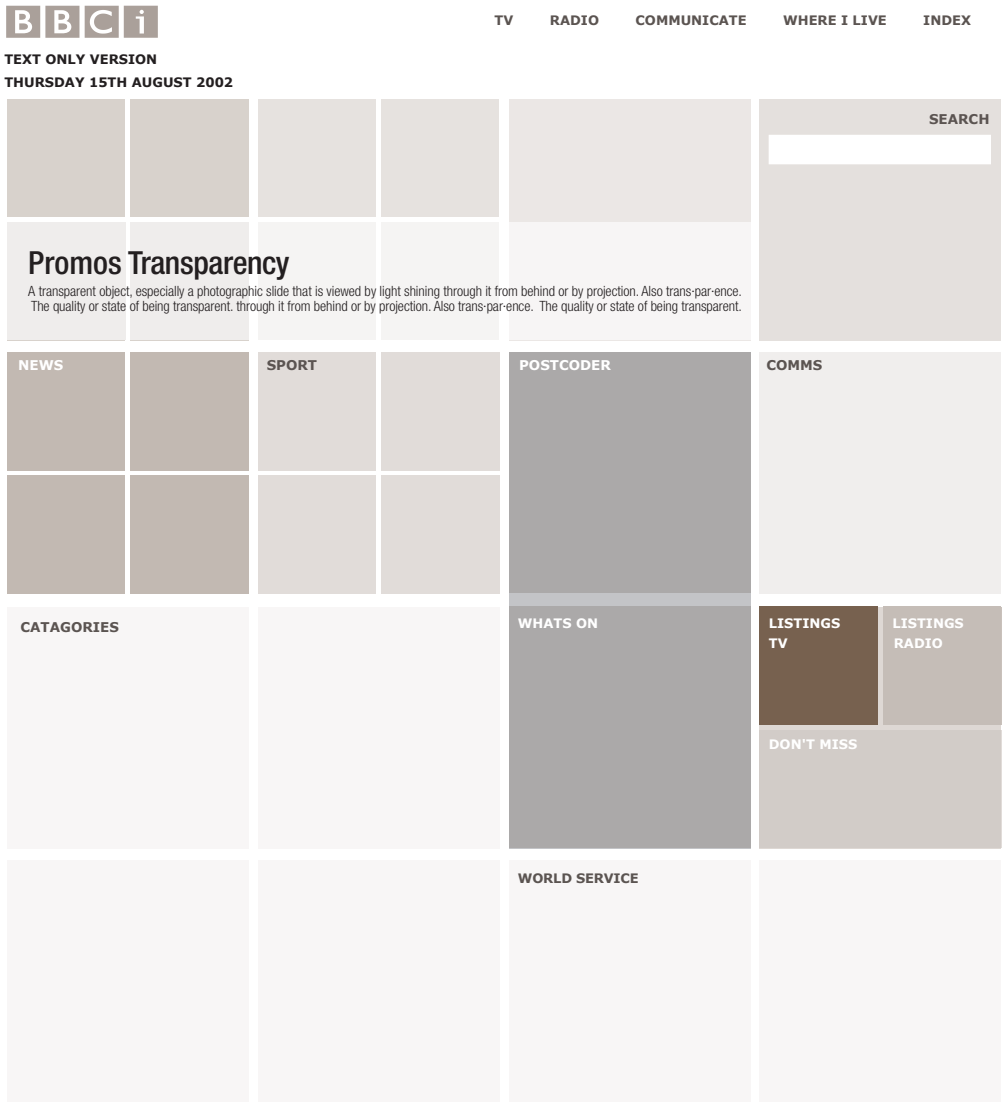
Early structural development was heavily tied into the ‘layers’ concept. Basic wire-frames were focused on variations of how the various page elements fed into each other and fitted logically together.

Specific attention was paid to the balance and relationship between the applications (search, postcoder) and content areas of the page.

Structure development





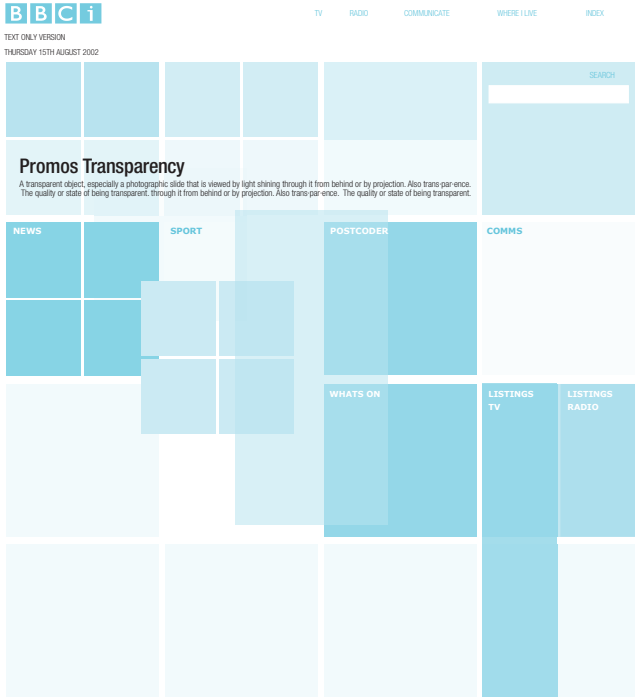


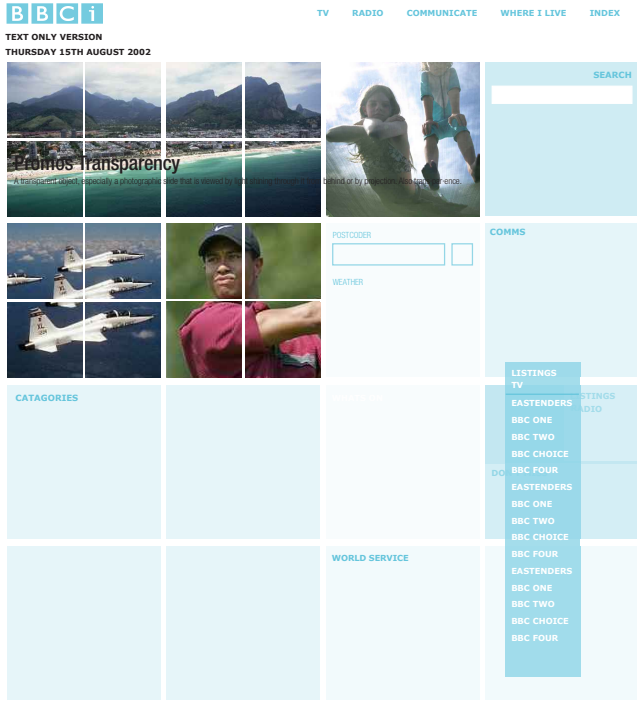
The grid

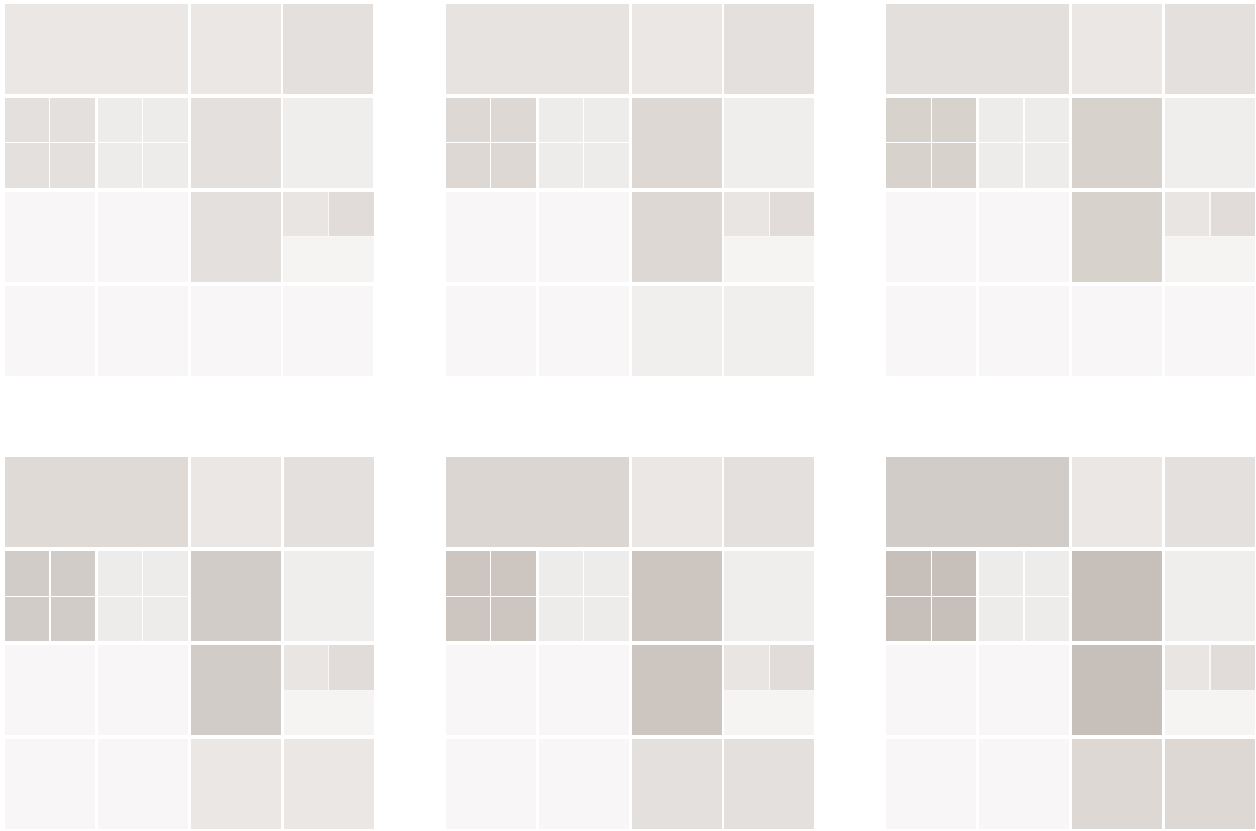
The whole page was designed on a grid. This provides flexibility and enables the relationship between each area of information to remain organised, clear and consistent.

Setting the tone

When the new promo was placed within the grid design it became obvious that different images had a huge impact on the page. It was decided that the overall colour of the homepage should be driven by the main promo image. Therefore the colour of the page would change each time the promo was updated.



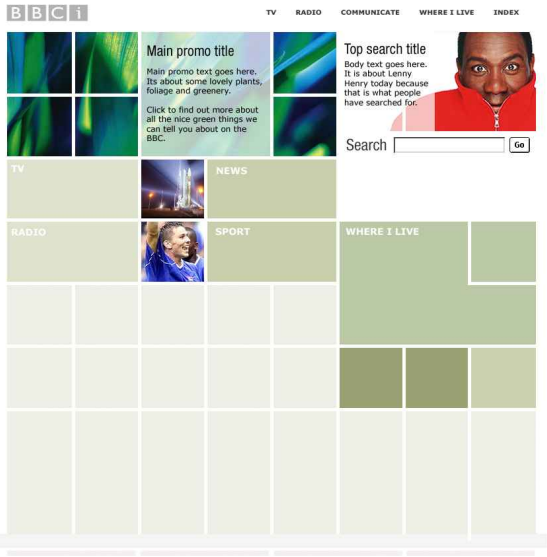


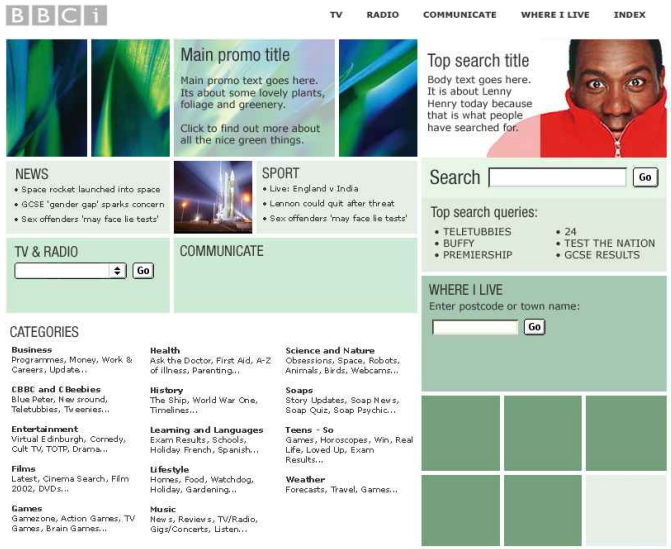


Areas of focus - the digital patina

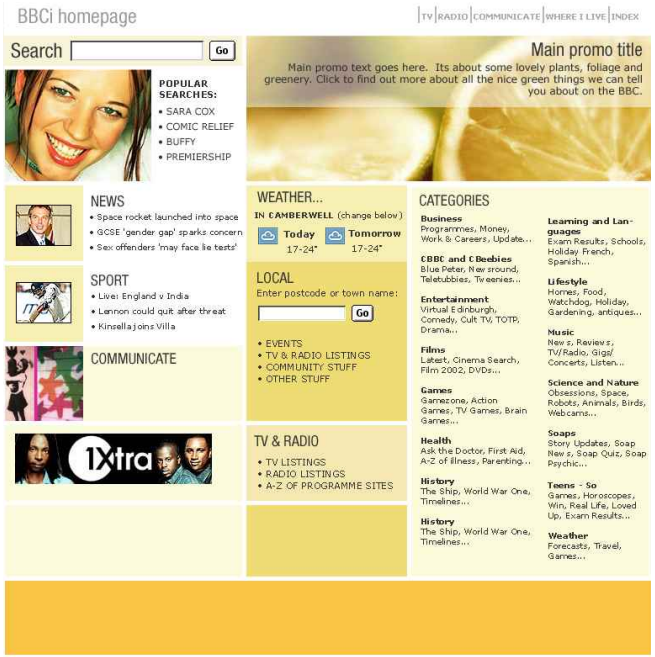
If the colour of the whole page could change, would it not be possible to allow the user's interaction to 'wear a path' in certain areas of the homepage? It meant that the saturation of the most commonly used part of the page (for each individual) would subtly become more intense over time. Whilst retaining all the content it would be possible to have a more direct conversation with the user thus providing a richer and more relevant experience.

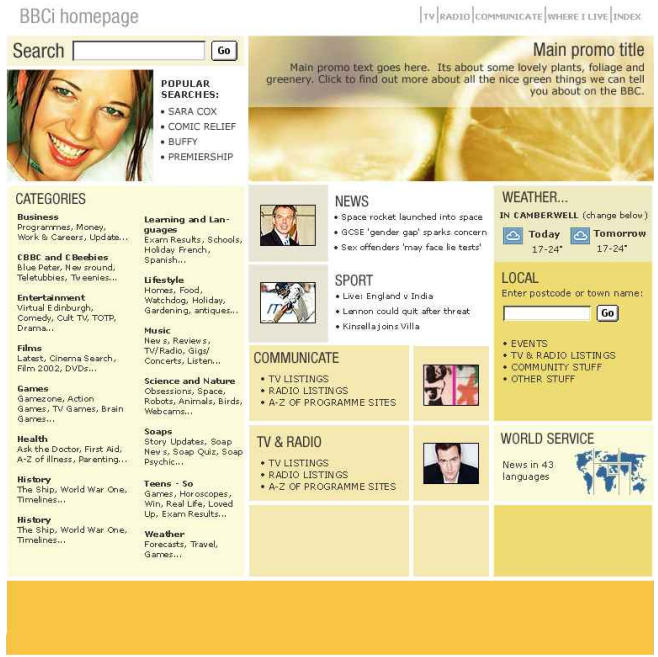
Design iterations 1



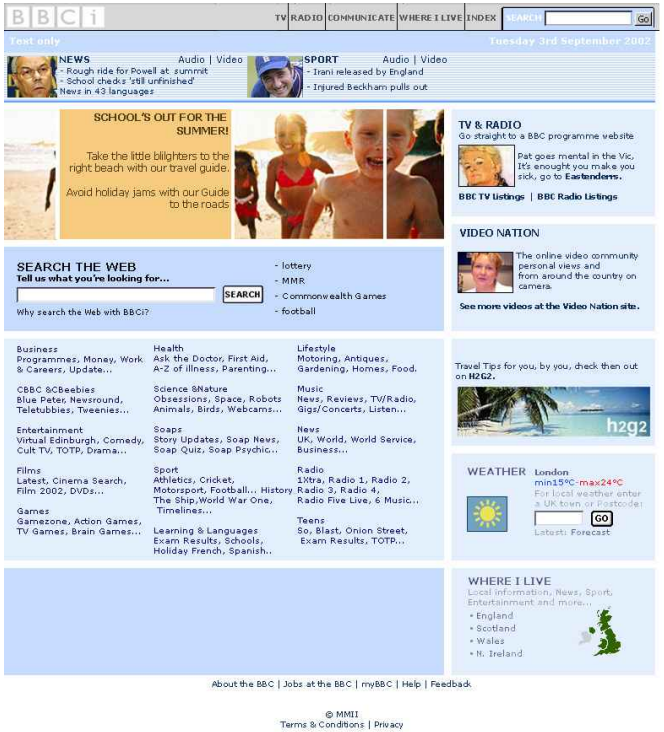


Design iterations 2





Design iterations 3



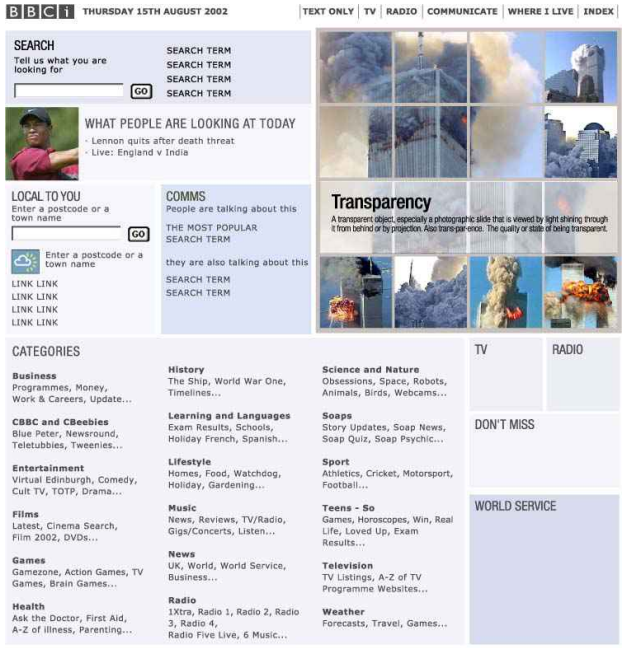
Search

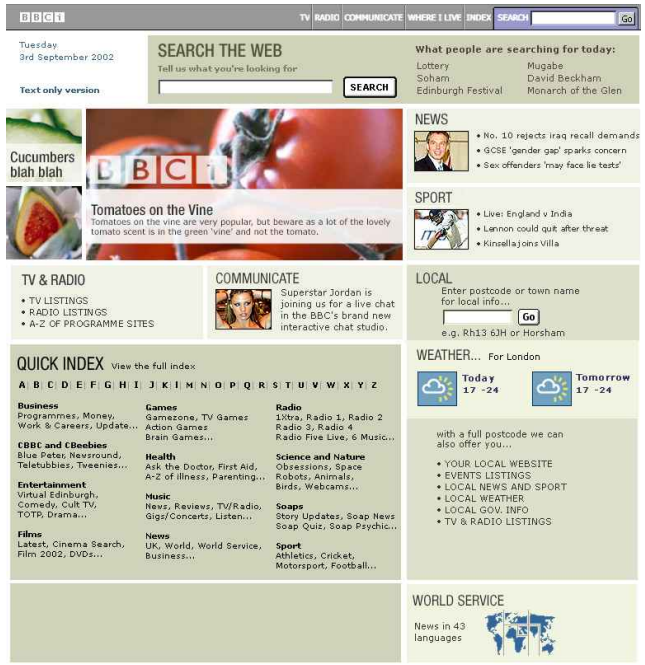
In an attempt to make BBCi the central hub of the users' online experience, the importance of search cannot be underestimated.

A good, solid and functional area of page real-estate was needed and where better than the top-left corner of the page? This is the area which the user sees first, and as our goal is to enable the users to find content quicker this makes perfect sense.

We toyed with the idea of displaying an image associated with the top search. But the context of a user’s search is all-important. The notion of searching for the country of Jordan but instead being shown an image of large-busted 'glamour' model was enough to put the idea on ice for a while.

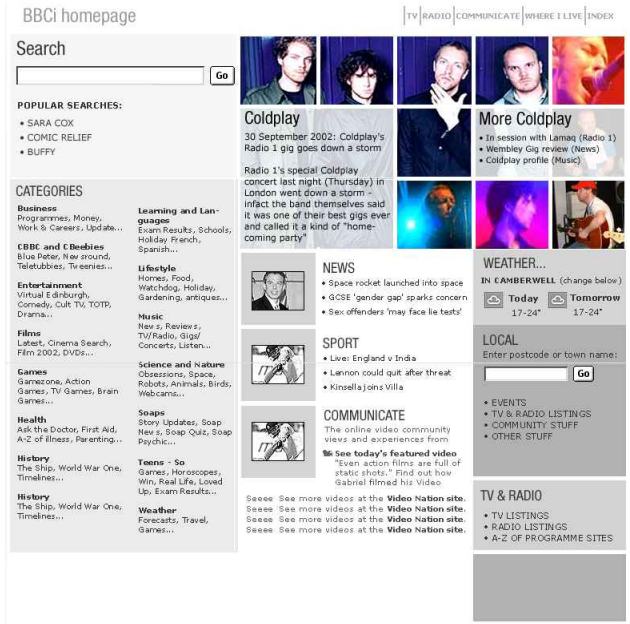
Search iterations 1





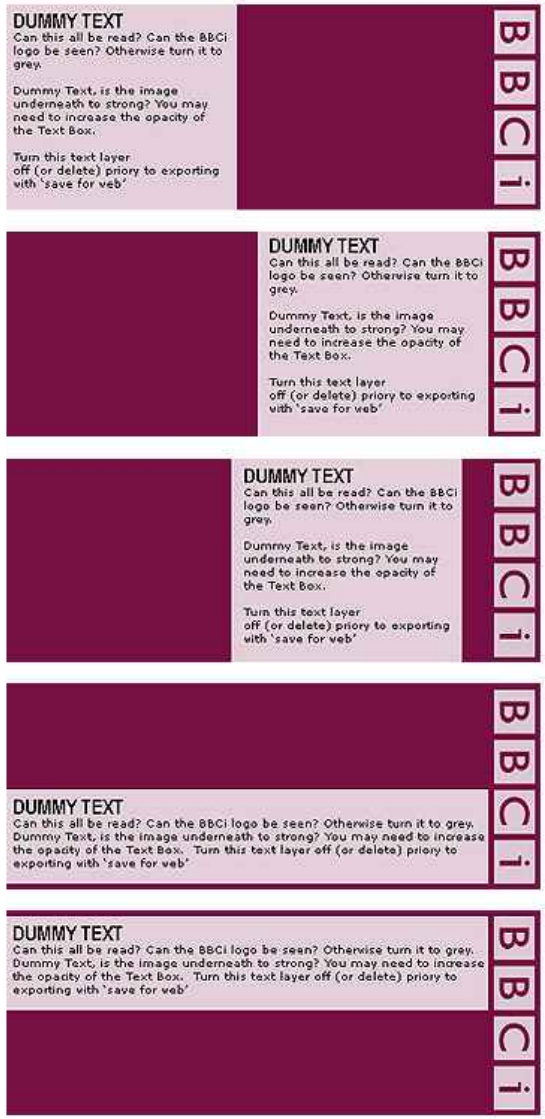
Search iterations 2

More structure ideas



Concept phase

Promo treatment - version 2



Promo templates

We decided on five template designs for the new promo space. This gave us a lot more flexibility when cropping and composing promo images, and a much more involved relationship between the contents, with the copy sitting on top or within the image.

The position of the text box is either flush right, left, or just off centre, lining up within the grid design of the page. We also developed two horizontal or strip style variations.

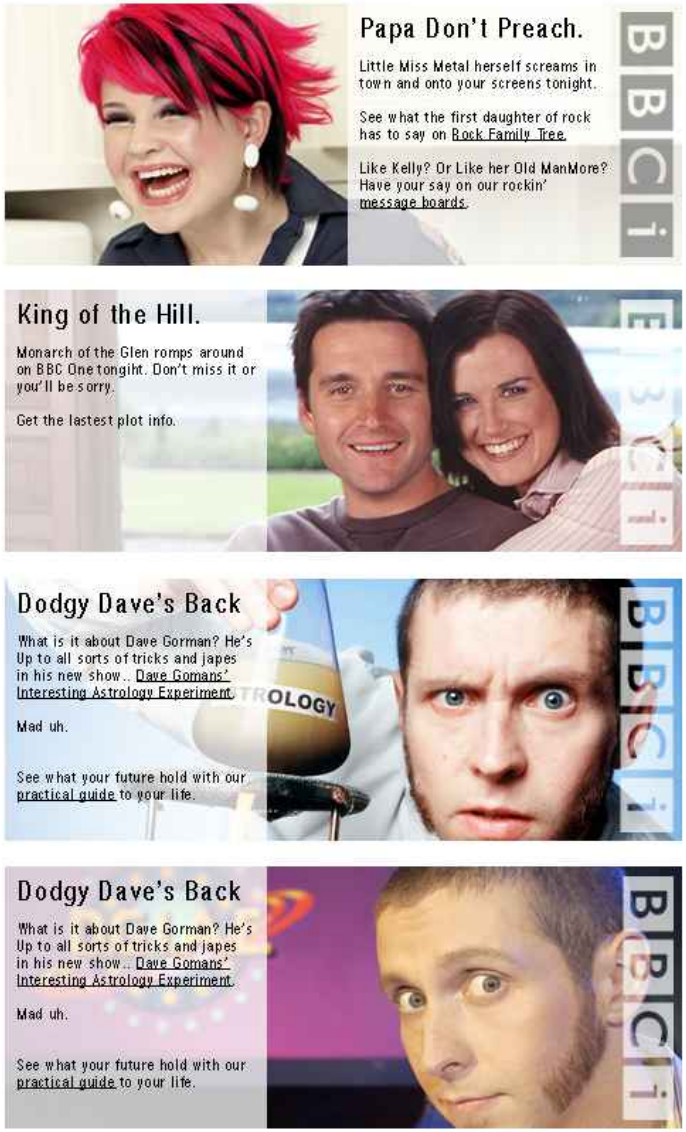
Interplay of word and image

For the new promo design to work successfully there had to be a harmony or interplay between the image and text. The image had to be dynamic and visually interesting in order to entice the user. It needed to be a well thought through piece of high quality design. Often the promo copy will offer users two or three links to different areas. The picture to accompany this must be versatile enough to be relevant for all the links.

It was also important to remember the targeted group that each promo was aimed at. 'Entertainment seekers' (16-34) as a group are very visually aware. Consequently their media can be treated in a more dynamic way such as using vibrant colour schemes and unusual cropping.

'Lifestylers' on the other hand get the majority of 'themed' promos, and lifestyle subjects like gardening and food which lend themselves best to 'abstract' or 'conceptual' images.

Promos aimed at the last group, the 'Default/First timers' reach a very wide demographic of users. Promos must be a combination of the other two, with a main point of focus and be easily readable.



Promo iterations

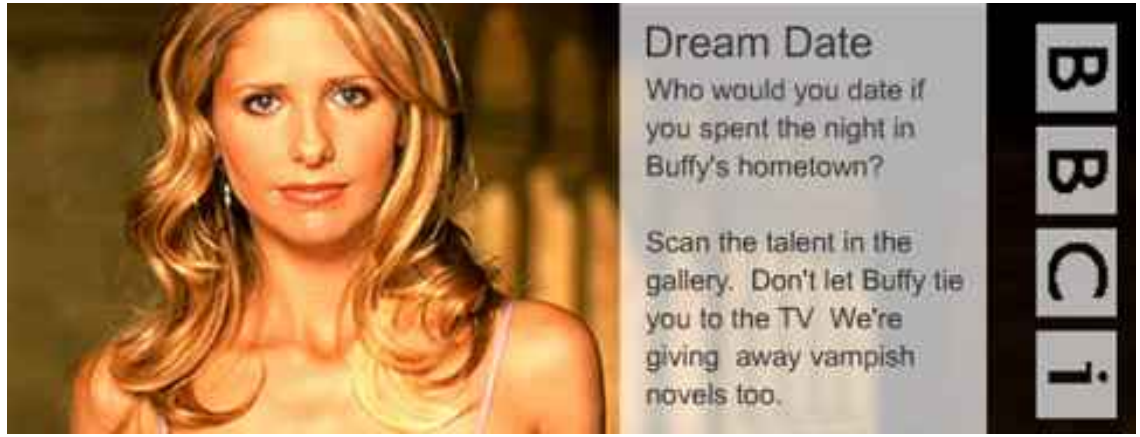
‘Story over time’ iterations

Adding movement

Movement within the promo space was also a consideration. Although this raised technical issues, the idea and reason behind it was sound, especially when coupled with the idea of story over time. We then had the opportunity to introduce the notion of narrative.

In this example we see a shark, then the screen fades to black. The next couple of images are close silhouettes of the shark against the sea surface, again fading to black. Suddenly a rapid succession of biting images flash on screen, then jet black. The final image then 'floats' to the surface and the text appears. This treatment would best be put to use on large-scale pan-BBC projects like Walking with Dinosaurs.

More movement ideas



Build phase

Final iterations

Usability results

Over 60 users participated in 10 user test sessions during May, September and October. All involved participation or observation by the members of homepage team. Changes were made iteratively throughout the process. Testing in the post-launch phase is to continue.

Aspects explored in sessions to date include:

· emotional response in the understand phase
· overall homepage look, feel and understanding in prototyping phases
· colour treatment, page structure and layout (over 15 variations used)
· promo treatment, understanding and effectiveness
· simple task performance, browse, search and navigation behaviour
· understanding and use of local postcode functionality
· new TV and Commmunicate homepage understanding
· introduction of an alphabetical index in the categories section
· card sorting of labelling in the categories section.

Results

· Throughout the process overall reactions were extremely positive.
· The A to Z list to browse categories was understood, used and appeared very effective.
· Colour treatment of pages adds soul and character, it provokes a emotive response.
· Much of the emotional impact is from the new promo image treatment.
· The implicit grid structure is effective, providing visual clarity to the information displayed.
· Presentation of categories as a two-column list provides for better navigation.
· User-centred organisation and labelling of categories has been suggested.
· New logo and visual branding is effective.

Categories

The categories area within the homepage is a vital area of real estate and an essential point of access for the user into a wealth of content.

Any discussions about a redesign or reshuffle of the categories area within the homepage always involve strong opinions and the balance between what is preferred by the user, what is politically desired by the individual 'petals' and what is 'right' for the business is always tricky.

The process of re-organisation was pretty systematic. Initial research into other possible models of classification (taxonomies) was carried out and several models of classifications and information seeking 'tools' were evaluated and tested to see if they would fit in with BBCi's current content proposal. A purely taxonomic approach to the content was politically impossible at this stage of BBCi's development so it was proposed that the best way forward was to organise and group the content based on the current content structure and more importantly the user's preferred sorting. To this end a large card sorting exercise was organised and this was used as the basis of our category reorganisation. Shortcuts to the A-Z BBCi index were also added to help speed up the information-seeking process.

The final model is a delicately balanced trade-off between the purely taxonomical, the preferred user grouping and the politically important, current BBCi content creation structure. However, what this actually amounts to is a far more logical and easier user journey which helps the user considerably when seeking content.

Using colour

Page colour variations

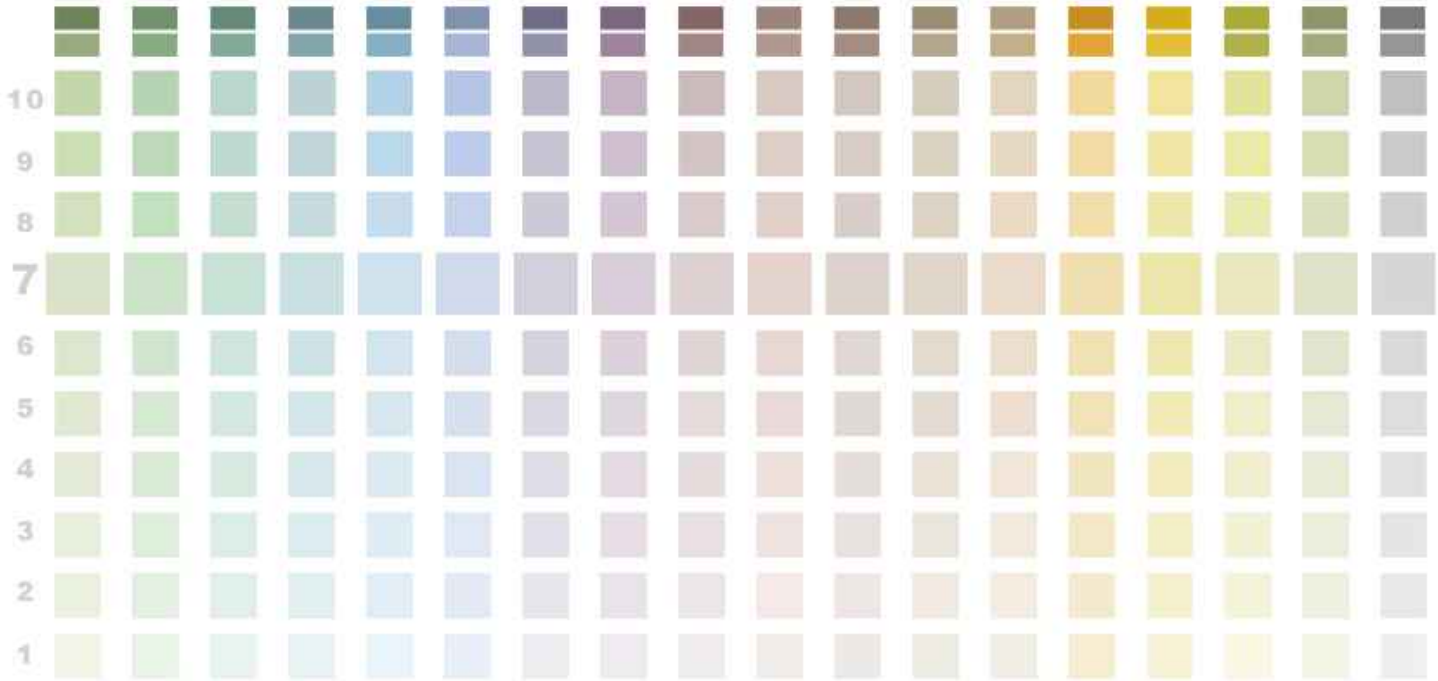
How the digital patina changes with use

The digital patina - full colour range

The promo image defines the colour for the whole page. As such it was necessary to create a swatch of colours which could cater for, and complement, every possible image that may be used.

The range covers the entire colour spectrum but each hue had to be individually adapted to the appropriate saturation and lightness to ensure subtlety and optimum contrast against text.

Each hue was then broken into 10 stages from the lightest to the most intense to provide the digital patina.



Build phase

Ancillary pages

The Communicate page

The Television page

Launch

BBCi | CATEGORIES | TV | RADIO | COMMUNICATE | WHERE I LIVE | INDEX | SEARCH | Go

Text only | MAKE THIS YOUR HOMEPAGE

BBCi

Wednesday 20th November 2002

SEARCH THE WEB

SEARCH

the Web / BBCi only

POPULAR SEARCHES RIGHT NOW ARE:

- bitesize
- eastenders
- fantasy football

Why search the web with BBCi?

"Sex Bomb"

That's what they're saying about Ainslie on the **message board**... but which **Fame Academy** student do you support? Have your say!

Vote to help your favourite along the road to success.

Would you like to be in the limelight? Get top tips from the professionals at **OneMusic**.

NEWS

Audio | Video

- Race to contain tanker disaster
- Forces chief deals strike warning
- Cervical cancer vaccine success

News in 43 languages عربي | TÜRKÇE

SPORT

Audio | Video

- England wait on Crawley
- Gabbidon out for Wales
- Broadhurst secures Tour place

TV

- BBC TV schedules
- Digital TV
- A-Z of BBC programme websites

RADIO

- All BBC radio
- Launch radio player
- Radio schedules

WORLD SERVICE

News in 43 languages عربي | TÜRKÇE

- Arabic
- Chinese
- English
- Hindi
- Russian
- Spanish
- Urdu
- Others...

DON'T MISS

WHERE I LIVE

To get information for a different location, enter a postcode or town

GO

e.g. HR4 9AR or Hereford

Weather for SE5 8UT

light rain
min 7°C max 11°C

View the **5 day forecast**

Your local BBCi site:

- **London**

What's on for London: South:
Cinema, Clubs, Music, Comedy, Theatre, more...

Your BBC local radio station:

- **BBC London 94.9**
- **Schedule for BBC London 94.9**

Your local school league tables:

- **Primary schools**
- **Secondary schools and colleges**

COMMUNICATE

Your thoughts, your views
From antiques to holidays and gardening, share your ideas on the **Lifestyle message boards**.

BBCi DIRECTORY

A B C D E F G H I J K L M
N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Business & Money
Small Business, Money, News, Programmes, Work & Careers...

Children's
CBBC: Club, Art
CBeebies: Games, Stories...

Education & Learning
Schools, Colleges, Revision, Languages, Subject Listing...

Entertainment
Comedy, Drama, Films, Games, Lottery, Teens...

Health
Fitness, Healthy Living, Medical Conditions, Nutrition, Parenting...

History
Ancient History, Great Britons, Historic Figures, Pyramid, War & Conflict...

Lifestyle
Antiques, Food, Gardening, Holiday, DIY...

Music
News, Reviews, TV/Radio, Gigs/Concerts, Listen...

News
Business, Local, UK, Weather, World...

Science & Nature
Animals, Birds, Genetics, Robots, Space...

Society & Culture
Communicate, Crime, Disability, Religion & Ethics...

Sport
Cricket, Football, Motorsport, Other Sports...

View all categories...

YOUR BBC

- Contact us
- Help
- Jobs at the BBC
- About the BBC

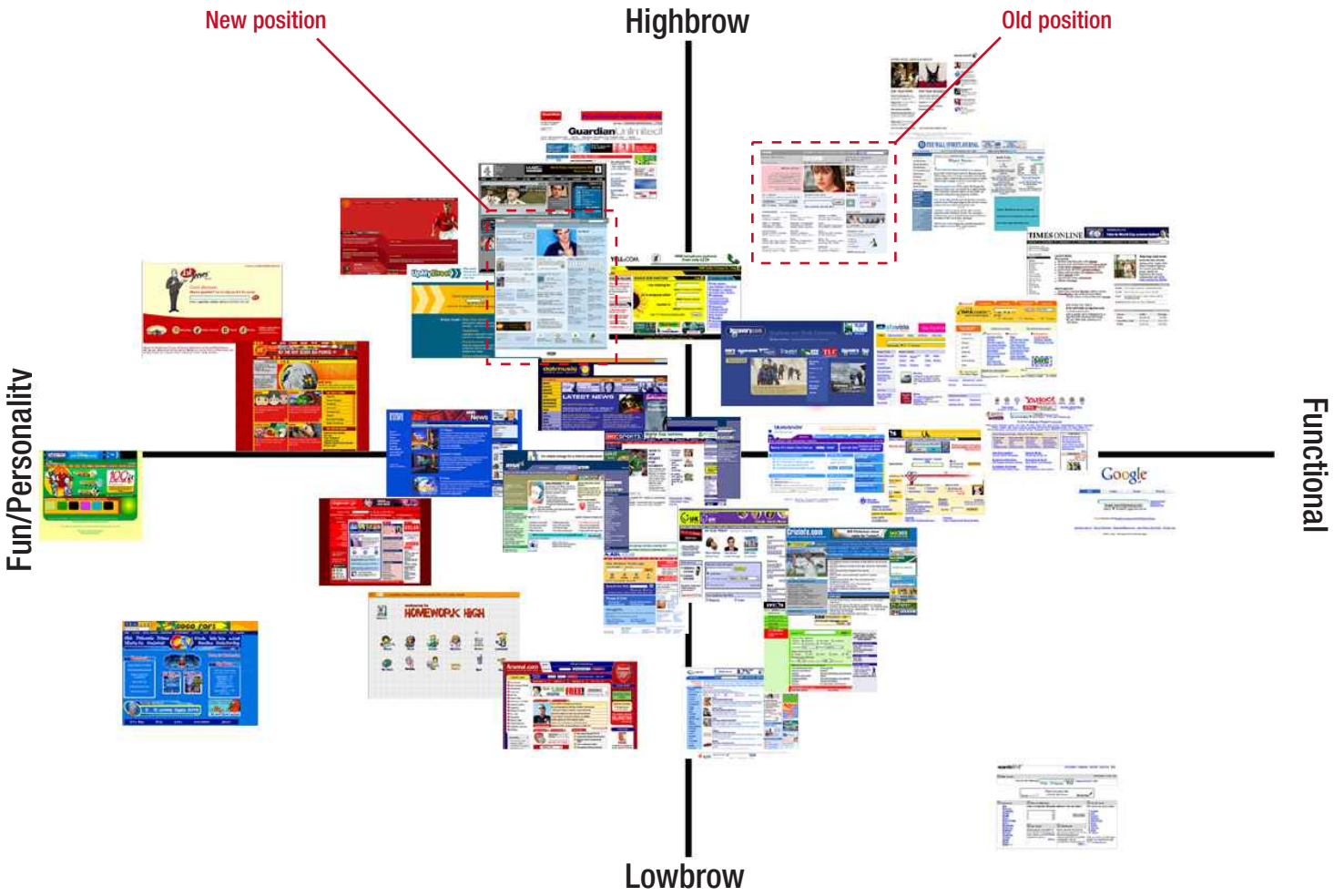
BBC Shop
Buy BBC products

CBeebies
Play and learn with CBeebies

Learning
BBC Learning resources for all

CBBC
Access your favourite shows

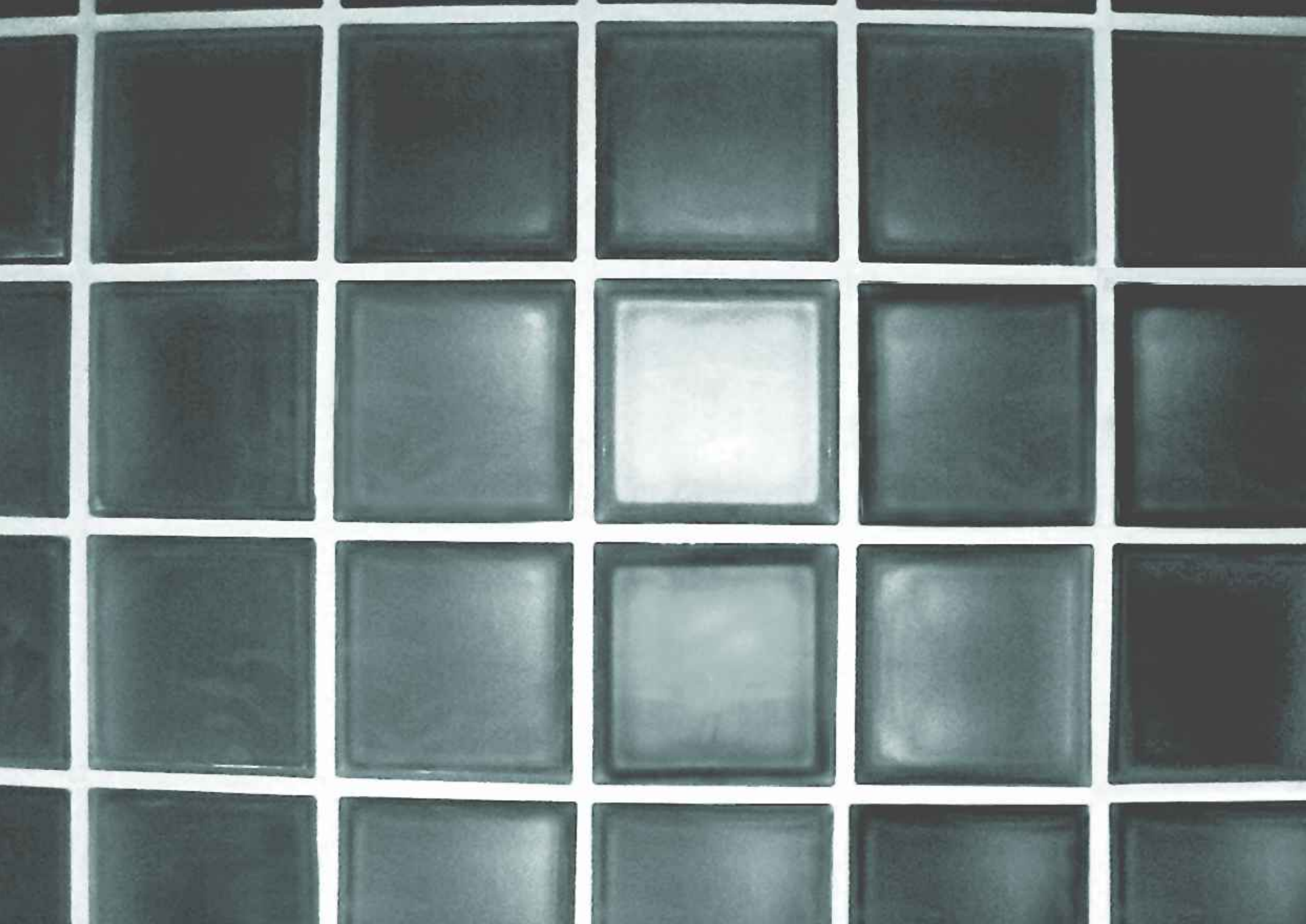
MAKE THIS YOUR HOMEPAGE



The return of the voice map

One closing task of the project was to return to our voice mapping boards and re-evaluate our position on it. This was a difficult task and perhaps an impossible one to do objectively. However, we do feel that the position of the new homepage in the voice map is a fair and accurate one.

The new page has much more personality, the warmth and soul of the promo images is now extended through the entire page. The various patina colours enable the page to speak with one unified voice. As regards vertical movement, we've repositioned ourselves to be more accessible, local and user centred, resulting in a less highbrow position and widening our reach.

The team

Andrew Bowden – Client-side Developer
Andrew Webb – Picture Editor
Andy Harris – Client-side Developer
Annabel Else – Producer/Project Manager
Carol Patten – Homepage Designer
Caroline Smith – User Experience Designer
Christina Nsamba – Project Manager
Gee-Kay Wong – Usability Manager
Gideon Bullock – Senior User Experience Designer
Jonathan Kingsbury – Head of Editorial Affairs
Julie Dodd – User Experience Designer
Mark Hewis – Development Team Leader
Paul Hammond – Senior Client-side Developer
Steve Hunt – Information Architect
Steve Rogers – Head of Design and Navigation
Tim Noble – Senior Operations Co-ordinator
Tony Ageh – Head of Search, Listings and Core Web
Venus Speedwell – Homepage Manager
Victoria Conlan – Perl Developer
Zoe Davenport – Homepage Designer