

MICROSOFT WINDOWS XP AND MEDIA PLAYER

Challenge

When Microsoft wanted an outside perspective for the design of its next-generation operating system, Windows XP, the company turned to frog design. frog was issued a sweeping mandate: to generate key elements of the user interface, including the media player UI and taskbars, combining ultra-contemporary allusions with an elemental, expressive, and visually sensitive whole. The project even came to encompass a revision of Windows' most recognizable component – its classic logo.

Discover: The Digital Touch

Industrial, brand, and digital designers worked together to identify a fresh visual language for Microsoft XP, marrying broad functionality with a highly stylized interface. For both the media player and taskbar UIs, frog defined a single, fundamental tenet: "softness." By invoking forms and textures of the three-dimensional world, frog sought to render the digital space more approachable to users. We experimented with the textures of various metals, wood grains, soft velvets and coarse fabrics, brightly colored rubber and neoprene, ceramics, sandpaper, foam, and plastics to find the perfect visual match for this approachable new UI – a materials selection that would invite the user's digital "touch" while exemplifying the highest standards of usability.

Design: A Sense of the Real

frog's design team assembled a rich palette of visual surfaces for the media player and taskbars, giving XP a unique, consistent design language that challenges the traditional digital media experience. Analog-style, "rubberized" buttons on the skin of Windows Media Player offer classic, intuitive navigation and avoid the hyper-technical feel of other online players. Brushed aluminum textures, rich colors, and dimensional lighting add a satisfying tactile quality to the user's online interactions, lending the experience a sense of the real.

To ensure the success of the digital model, our designers constructed an actual, physical version – a "hard model" – of the redesigned media player, built to scale, using the very materials whose surfaces, colors, and dimensions had inspired the digital environment. The production of an object in tangible space gave us a true standard by which to judge the usability of the digital incarnation.

Deliver: Looking Forward

With the product design in place, we turned our attention



ABOVE

Forms and textures from the tangible world bring a greater comfort to users' digital experiences.

to the Windows logo. Its classic four-color arrangement of red, green, yellow, and blue tiles on a pixelated pennant was seen to represent both windows opening onto the world and flags of exploration and discovery. The Windows mark needed to maintain the brand equity it had accrued in its long history while expressing the evolution towards a more flexible, user-friendly brand. frog developed a slate of fifty new logos, ranging from simple to radical alterations, then presented the top three candidates to Microsoft for selection. While recognizably a descendent of its predecessor, the reinvigorated logo is distinguished by its clean lines, energy, and movement – a bright, forward-looking emblem of the digital frontier.

Result

frog helped distinguish Microsoft Windows XP from competitors by drawing upon users' desires for a digital space that better reflects their real-world interactions. The final suite of media player skins and visual animations has informed and inspired subsequent generations of Microsoft products.

"It was obvious that the new functionality of Windows XP would demand an equally exciting look and feel throughout the product experience," says Steve Kaneko, the Design Director for Platforms at Microsoft. "With its experience in branding and interactive media, frog design was able to offer valuable support in creative exploration and strategy. This allowed us to deliver a more consistent and cohesive visual concept of Windows."