

Assignment n°1

Interface Analysis and Evaluation

A look at the usability of selected aspects of the Steam storefront

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Introduction



For my analysis I am looking at the storefront of the application Steam for PC, a web version is available [here](#). I am looking primarily at the features implemented in their latest usability update. These features focus on personalising the storefront to each user. To fully test these features I have used my personal account, as it already has plenty of data upon which to base recommendations.

I am working with a usability statement in mind: It should be easy for players to find and buy a game that is relevant to them.



: YUhi fYX'UbXFYWa a YbXYX'

This is an interactive display, featuring 1 of 12 games. The display features each game in the rotation for 6 seconds at a time, looping through the 12 options automatically.



This is a rectangular feature box displaying 4 + 6 games and a box that links to a list of all games that have a reduction in price currently. One of the featured games is "Today's deal" and features a countdown timer.

Featured Games

This is another rectangular feature box, shorter than the previous, but the same width. It features 4 + 4 games. Each game featured has a thumbnail, its price and 3 thumbnails of avatars, corresponding to friends of mine that own the featured game.

Trending Among Friends

This is a rectangular button, the same size as the "Trending Among Friends" but rather than featuring any information, leads to a separate feature of 12 games.

Discovery Queue

There are a lot of smaller buttons available to the experienced user, these provide shortcuts to specific lists of games, or allow you to search for specific games.

Below the Discovery Queue lie even more feature boxes, and the user can scroll down through these near indefinitely. These features include recommendations by Steam Curators, New Releases, Recently Updated, Under x price and several features that seem to be generated procedurally from my user data.

Methodology

The first step in my evaluation was to narrow down the scope of my analysis to something manageable for this assignment.

I had already established that I was primarily interested in the features designed for discovery, and thus evaluated which features were tailored toward those users that already know what they want.

I looked over the storefront and assessed the different elements available for analysis. In the scope of this assignment I needed to narrow down which elements were most relevant.

I concluded that "Featured and Recommended", "Special Offers" and "Trending Among Friends" are the core features that let users discover new games. The smaller buttons on the front page cater to experienced users who know what

they're looking for. I chose to disregard "Your Discovery Queue" as this feature leads to its own standalone system, and deserves its own analysis. The additional feature boxes below the discovery queue are interesting, but as these are procedurally generated each time the user scrolls down, it's outside the scope of this assignment to include them.

At this point I implemented my adaptation of the two-pass method of heuristic evaluation. I started with a single pass over my 3 chosen elements, while making notes and descriptions of features I encountered. After the initial pass I looked at each element in closer detail and analysed what worked and what didn't, considering both major and minor issues. Finally I considered some potential resolutions to the issues, and restructured all my notes into this document.

Reflections from the process are included at the end of the document.

<Yi f]gh]Wj-ä Y`Vobg]XYfYX`

F\` c_XTaWaTgheT_`

Is it easy and natural to navigate the storefront, does the style and visuals help me do so?

FcXT^`g[X'hfXeff`_JaZhTZX`

Is there a lot of confusing terms, or does the language clarify my options?

7baf`fgXag`

Are there different things that do the same thing, and do things that look the same consistently do the same thing?

Cebi`WX: XXWUTV^`

Is anything loading / not loading, and am i being informed of those things? Have I been redirected somewhere without a clear message about why?

FTYX`9k`gf`

Can I easily exit from the current page? Can I accidentally exit the current page?

9eebe`ceXi Xag`ba`

Do I encounter any errors, do I get error messages, and what are those messages? Are there systems in place to prevent errors, do they succeed in preventing errors?

Implementation

: YUhi fY' €hYfUMjcb'8YhUj`g

: YUhi fYX'UbXFYWa a YbXX'

This is an interactive display, featuring 12 games. With no user input the featured game will change to the next in the list every 6 seconds. If the user mouses over the text or pictures this rotation is paused until the mouse is no longer over the box. Mousing over any part of the internal display will also pop out an information box on the right side of the feature. Mousing over the thumbnails in the righthand box will highlight them in the lefthand part of the feature. Mousing over one of the 12 small rectangles below the feature will swap the highlighted game, mousing over the 1st square swapps you to the 1st game in the feature.

Mousing over the feature will also bring up a small button with two down arrows. Clicking this button reveals a menu with 3 clickable options that let the user; add the game to wishlist, assign a "Not Interested" tag or go to the preferences for store content in account preferences. The larger arrows on the left and right of the feature box require mouse click, and will skip to the next or previous game in the feature. Clicking any other part inside the feature box will bring the user to the game's store page, via an age check if the title is rated 18+.

GdYUj CZYfg

This is an interactive display featuring 4 + 6 games. Similar to the "Featured and Recommended" mousing over any of the games will pop out an information box to the right, but in contrast the box in this instance is attached to the individual game rather than the overall feature box. There are only 2 pages to cycle through with the left and right arrows, and so only two small rectangles below the feature box to shuffle through the pages. Another difference is the "Browse All" button on the top right border of the box. Clicking this button redirects to a filtered list of games containing every game that is currently on offer. The user gets redirected to a similar list when clicking the first option on the first page of the feature "Weeklong Deals", but this list is somewhat shorter.

HfYbXjb['5a cb[: f]YbXg'

This is an interactive display much like the others, with 4 + 4 games featured over 2 pages. The only additional feature here is the addition of a small bar below each game with 3 avatars, these correspond to 3 friends that own the featured game. Mousing over one of these avatars brings a new information box into view directly to the left of the avatar. This box contains an enlarged view of the avatar and some info from the corresponding friend's steam profile.

DfcV'Ya g'UbX'Docg|hj Yg'fVn\Yi f]g]Mz

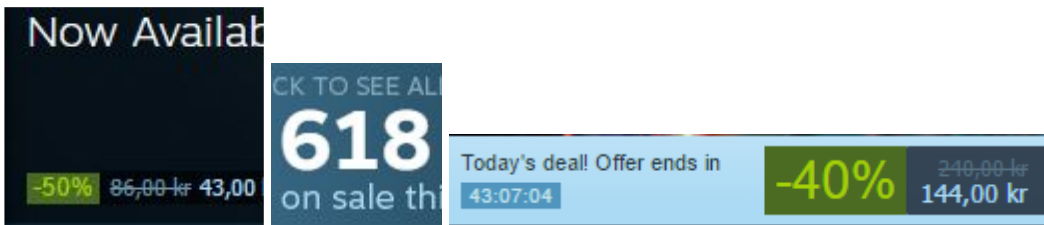
GJa d'Y'UbX'buhi fU'

@h_gc_X': bagf 'TaWf\mXf !'dfhX'

The storefront uses primarily a white font, but multiple typefaces, font sizes and font colours are used in different parts of the features. This does improve the experience.

Fgl _X!'f'fhX'

The primary colours used in the page are shades of blue. At least 7 different shades of blue are used in feature boxes (discluding colours in game thumbnails). Discount percentages are highlighted in green. There are too many different colours to be simple and natural. There are several different styles being used across the different feature boxes. Different styles yet in the store pages of the games.



GdMU_g'h'YI g'faj@b[i U'Y'

; T` X'GXe` \ab_bZl'

The steam storefront is full of language and terminology catered to seasoned gamers. As the primary market for Steam is gamers this can be seen as a positive, however it can also be an issue as it can put off new users. I think the steam store can be a somewhat overwhelming, even intimidating, experience for a new user.

7cbg]ghYbWn'i

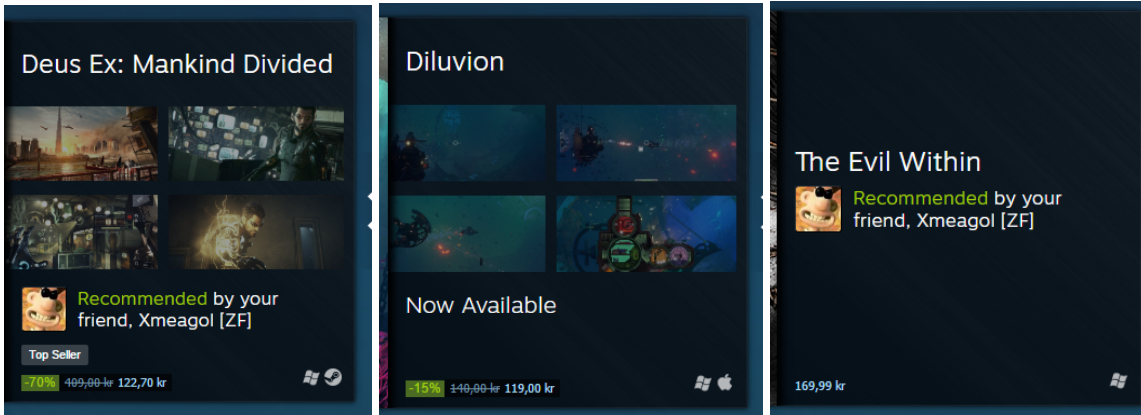
ðbaf'ba 'YXTgheXf'be'a 'a'Ybe` Tg'ba 'UbKXf!'dfhX'

Tells me which platforms the game works on, style is somewhat inconsistent across feature boxes, information boxes and game store pages.



: XTgheXW; T` Xf 'TWWg'baT_`a'Yb!'dfhX'

There's information on why it was recommended on SOME of the featured games, but there is inconsistency in the way this information is presented, and some games do not have any information on why it was featured.



@ bhfXbi Xe'8ebcWbj a '@Xah !'dfhX'

When mousing over any of the featured games a small button appears. It's not very obvious but appears consistently in all 3 feature boxes. Always in the top right corner of the game largest image of the game within the feature. The menu allows the user to either mark "not interested", add the game to their wishlist, or choose an option that leads out of the store, to the users preferences for the store in account settings.

Choosing "Not interested" Will make the featured game instantly disappear, if chosen in the "Featured & Recommended" however in "Special Offers" and "Trending Among Friends" this option will fade the game out, but keep it visible.



ǎ Ybe` Tg'ba `c'bcbhg'Ubk !'Cbf'g'N X'

The popout works exactly the same across all three feature boxes, appearing attached to the right of a game when the user mouses over it.



Dfgj]XY: YYXUW'

% Ž'ETgXWZT` Xf!'f'fhX'

When clicking a game that is rated 18+ users are redirected to a page with a prompt for the users date of birth. The user is not informed that the game has an 18+

rating, but rather just stated that date of birth is required to continue. Failing to put in a valid date of birth leads to a page stating "Sorry, but you're not permitted to view these materials at this time."

?bTWaZ`UXgj`XXa`cTZxf`!`f`fhX`

When loading a new page, going back or forth between game pages there is no obvious feedback, in my testing there was a slight but noticeable delay before the next page loads.

?bTWaZ`aXj`YXTgheXf`a`fVeb`_!`c`bf`g`N`X`

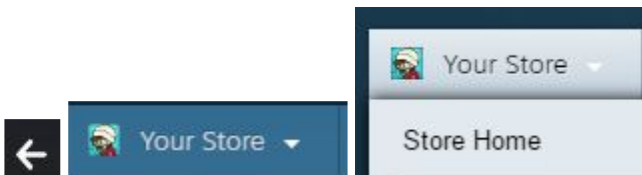
Shows a clear loading icon while generating more features.



QZY`9`Jhg`

A`b`V`XTe`Xk`g`f`!`f`fhX`

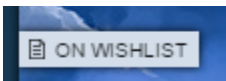
There is no clear exit from a store page once a user has clicked a game. The user must either use the left arrow key on the steam interface, which is outside the storefront environment, use the slightly counterintuitive "Your Store" button to return to the store front, there is also the "Store Home" button if you mouse over "Your Store", adding one more step to do the same thing.



9ffcf`Dfy`Yb]cb`

âBa`J`V`[_fgā`GTZ`!`c`bf`g`N`X`

Tells me that this game is on my wishlist, saves me time.



ð/baf`ba`YXTgheXf`be`a`a`Ybe`Tg`ba`Ub`kXf`!`c`bf`g`N`X`

Tells me which platforms this game works on, preventing me from mistakenly buying a game I cannot run.

:`gXe`Bj`a`XW`T`Xf`!`c`bf`g`N`X`

Does not recommend any games that are already in my inventory, saves me time.

:`gXe`Bj`a`XW`T`Xf`!`f`fhX`

Does not recommend any games that are already in my inventory, issue if I'm looking for gifts for a friend.

@bhfXbi Xe'cTZX`V[TaZX!'`ffhX`

Mouseover instantly swaps to a new page, the boxes are tiny and accidentally mousing over them is very easy.

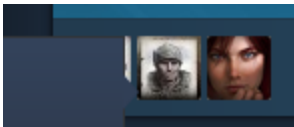


âA bg`âagXeXfgXWâ'gTZ!'`ffhX`

Adding the "Not Interested" tag instantly removes the game from the "Featured and Recommended" section, with no undo. The user must look up the game by other means to remove the tag if it was applied in error.

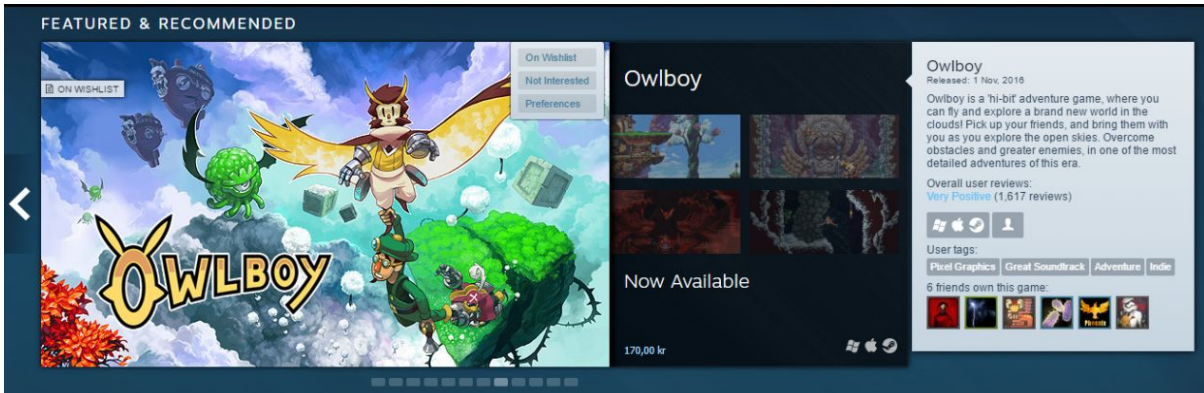
Bi Xe_Tcc`aZ`5i TgTe`a`âGeXaWwZ`5` baZ`: eXaWf`ã!'`ffhX`

When mousing over the middle or rightmost avatar, any avatar to the left will be obscured. Moving from left to right the user has a smooth view of information, but from right to left there is a stuttering. The user must move the mouse away and back for the next avatar to the left.

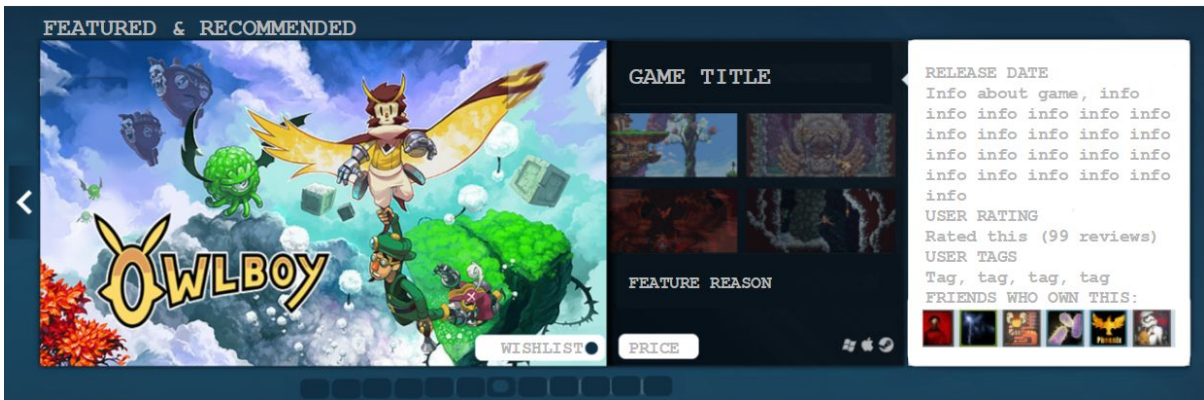


Recommendations

6XYbeX."



5YqXe.'



FhZZXfgXWW[T a ZXf `Ybe'g[X `fgbeXYebag`YXTgheXf.'

Change from multiple fonts to one (or two) fonts, leave only two (or three) sizes of font in use.

Try to keep to only a few colours, not so many shades. I used Black, white and grey, and reused the two most prominent shades of blue. These colour choices could be improved, as long as there are not too many different / non complementary colours.

Improve cleanliness of style, I haven't done much on this front, but try to bring boxes to use the same shading styles, roundedness and borders. Try to use similarly sized fields. Increase size of the mouse-over squares below the feature, makes them more visible and less prone to accidental use.

Remove or implement a "bounce back" on the mouseover squares. When mousing over one of the squares below the feature, temporarily change to the corresponding game. If the user clicks the square, change to that game. If the user does not click, but instead moves the mouse again, revert to previously displayed game. This prevents accidentally swapping the featured game, while keeping the functionality of being able to quickly look through the featured games.

Don't repeat info in the mouse-over pop-out box. Game title and platform icons are already known information and thus not needed. Keep the information box open for user to mouseover, additional information about which friends have this game and ability to click tags could be useful.

Mouseover Dropdown Menu containing “add to wishlist” and “not interested” should be merged with the “on wishlist” tag, and would be better placed in the lower right corner near the price of the game. This way if the game is on your wishlist you can easily see that, and the current price. The drop-down would then be a drop-up with the ability to mark “not interested” above “on wishlist/add to wishlist”

Information pop-outs should be the same style and colour throughout. The information popout for friends avatars should not overlap, and should be of the same style as other popouts.

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18+ Rated games should be marked as such on their feature, the redirect screen should inform the user that this title has an age restriction in their country. This gives the user feedback on why they have been redirected to this screen.

When you click any game on the storefront, loading begins instantly to bring you to that game’s store page, however no obvious indicator is given. There is a brief but noticeable lag (on my system, other systems may suffer greater lag) before the new page is loaded.

Currently there are no clear exits or back buttons. Add in a hovering back/home button in the left corner. This is a more prominent issue as displays are becoming higher and higher resolutions and small buttons disappear among the myriad of other features.

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Add a gift store mode where owned games are not filtered from Featured and Special Offers. Add a section to Trending Among Friends that also displays “You’ve played this a lot, buy it for a friend”.

Make the default storefront less cluttered with tiny buttons to loads of categories, let the current default be an advanced option. Put a preferences button somewhere better than the mouseover dropdown of a featured game.

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