/website build-off
Video game sites

We challenge three leading designers to find compelling ways to market video games online

See the pages in full! >
View the designs at:
netm.ag/bodgers-221
netm.ag/invasion-221
netm.ag/zombies-221

The brief

Mock up the homepage for a video game site. This can be for a particular fictional game, or a portal for multiple titles. Make it engaging and entice people to play.

Designers

Name Nik Gill
Company Remix
URL www.remixcreative.net
Nik is a graphic designer based in Sheffield. He has over 10 years' agency experience working with such diverse clients as EMI, Renault and a host of web and design agencies all around the world.

Name Andrew Machin
Company Branded3
URL www.branded3.com
Andrew has been a web designer for over 11 years. He's currently head of design at digital marketing and SEO agency Branded3, specialising in design, strategy and user experience.

Name Cole Henley
Company TINY v
URL www.tinyv.com
An accomplished jack of all trades, Cole freelances under the moniker TINY v, dividing his time between design, front-end development, CMS-wrangling and bouts of verbiage on Twitter as @cole007.

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Nik Gill's solution

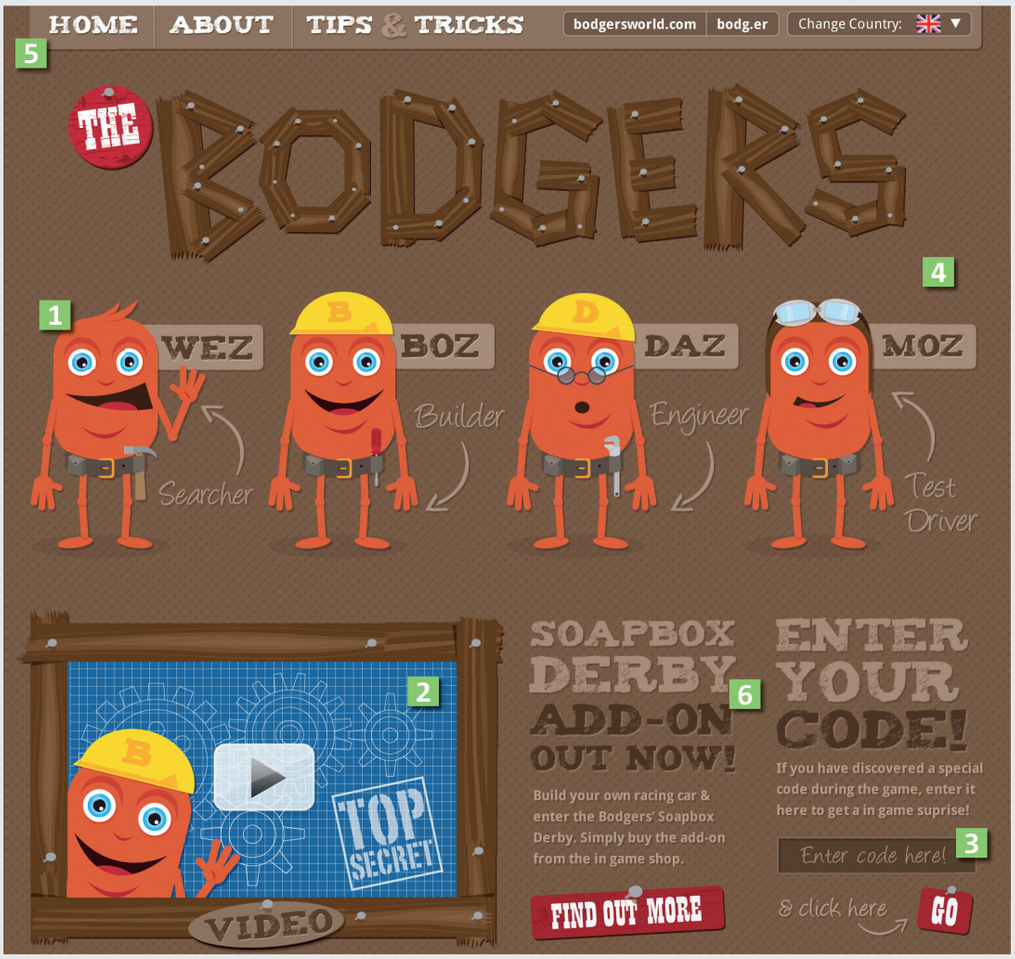
I've based my design on a fictional game called The Bodgers. It's a game in which players control and assign tasks to their Bodgers to build machinery and transport from parts they find in the junkyard. Players can follow a single-player game where they build machinery off-plan to solve a number of problems. Online gamers can build a myriad of contraptions to compete with each other against the clock. And since the focus of the game is speed and ingenuity, the machines that are bodged don't always last until the end of the job!

I seldom get an opportunity to use my illustration skills outside personal projects, so I jumped at the chance to get into some character design. The characters are simple, and yet each has its own personality to add to the site. The design of the characters is carried through to the game.

When people visit the website I want them instantly to get a feel for the characters and what they're about. Each one is shown by name and also what function he serves in the game. The secondary focus of the site will be the video, which will serve as an introduction to the game for those who are unfamiliar with the concept.

The goals of this design are to introduce new players to the game and to provide existing gamers with the ability to find helpful tips and tricks. Current players can also locate information about the add-on pack and process the special codes that they find during the game.

Close up



1 Characters The Bodgers are the most important aspect of the game. To increase familiarity with the characters and their roles, I brought them to the fore. Simple movements could be shown with some CSS3 animation.

2 Video The prominently displayed HTML5 video showreel will introduce the game concept. For visitors who are unfamiliar with the idea behind the game, this is an important part of the site experience.

3 Enter code Throughout the game, players will encounter codes, which they can enter here online, and can choose to receive extra add-ons that will be credited directly to their user account.

4 Site colours With the main setting of the game being a workshop and junkyard, I've chosen earthy tones for the background. This works especially well with the oranges, blues and reds of the other elements.

5 Menu bar The menu bar sits at the top of the page, and it contains the main site links, the language selector and the URLs. The menu items would animate with CSS3 on hover for an added effect.

6 Add-on pack This is a prominent link to a new add-on pack that's available for the game. The Soapbox Derby add-on enables players to construct and race a soapbox car online with other competitors.

Expert info

Nik Gill's month

What have I been doing?
As a relative newcomer to working for myself, the past month has been spent working hard while chasing new jobs and old invoices – the latter sometimes proving very tricky! My days have mostly been spent designing PSD comps for other local web design agencies, though I do like to get my hands dirty with a bit of coding whenever I can.

Sites I've visited
It's a bit of a cliché, but I'm addicted to Dribbble (dribbble.com). I'm also a regular to Veerle Pieters's Inspiration Stream (veerle.duoh.com/inspiration).

What have I been watching?
I'm totally loving *Torchwood: Miracle Day* and I'm also rewatching *The Walking Dead*.

What have I been listening to?
I've recently discovered the Howling Bells and I'm waiting with eager anticipation for the new Ladytron album.

Turn over to see solutions from Andrew Machin and Cole Henley >>

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Expert info

Andrew Machin's month

What have I been doing?
I've seen a large increase in the amount of production work people want, so most of my time has been spent working on some great little microsites, emails and banners.

Sites I've visited
I find most of my inspiration on Twitter – if you follow the right people, you can discover some of the most incredible content. Oh, and netmagazine.com, of course...

What have I been watching?
Our TV is showing back-to-back episodes of *Thomas the Tank Engine* at the moment – since my little boy discovered it – so I'm finding there's very little worth seeing! Instead, I've discovered the TED app on the iPad, so I'm mostly watching that.

What have I been listening to?
I've been playing Two Door Cinema Club's album *Tourist History* quite a lot this month – it's toe-tapping stuff. Oh, and Rebecca Black's Friday has become something of an anthem at the office.

Andrew Machin's solution

I'm old enough to remember when the first generation of games consoles came out. After video games had gained commercial success in the arcades, households were for the first time being introduced to Pong, Tank and Space Invaders. Games that had been successful in the arcades would become the theme for countless clones and imitations that found their way onto the first consoles.

I remember my dad bringing home an Atari 2600. It was one of the most popular consoles of its time – so popular that people were buying it just so they could play Space Invaders in the comfort of their own living rooms. It became the first must-have video game. Back then, games would only gain notoriety through the arcades, rather than marketing. There was little in the way of advertising and the best promotion these console games could hope for was some badly illustrated cover art, probably done by one of the developers' friends.

It was with this in mind that I wanted to pay homage to a generation of games that never got a website, or any kind of big-budget marketing for that matter. So I designed this site for a fictional game called Invasion, based on the familiar theme of swarms of enemies attacking Earth. I chose this because out of all the video game themes that have emerged over the generations, this has endured to become one of the most popular. Whether you're playing Killzone, Gears of War or Space Invaders, the story of you being the last hope for mankind's survival against an aggressive alien foe has changed very little.

Close up

1 Videos Video and other rich media content is now a stalwart of modern games sites, featuring teaser trailers in the same way that a modern-day movie would. Here, you can watch the trailer for Invasion.

2 Leaderboards Arcade games were the original forms of social gaming – friends would congregate around the machines and compare scores. This site design allows friends to form leagues and compare scores online.

3 Design With most contemporary video games, the website often acts as the primary marketing catalyst. Therefore the focus of the design centres on Invasion's core proposition and so quickly sells the idea to the user.

4 Downloadable content Modern video games offer extra downloadable content to help the game stay fresh and keep people playing. Extra content for Invasion could be in the form of new enemy types and challenges.

5 Burning planet The image of the burning planet was created from a satellite photo of Earth composited with an image of the sun (courtesy of Nasa's library of images), overlaid with 'cracked' Photoshop brushes.

6 Alien The image of the pixellated alien has become a pop-culture icon. It's a nod to some of the first generation of computer game graphics, most notably Space Invaders, and the era that inspired this project.

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Cole Henley's solution

Ever wanted to frag undead German robots from World War II? Now you can! The fictional game Killer Robot Nazi Zombies is an intense, tongue-in-cheek offering for the iPhone, marrying the frenetic action of a first-person shooter with the mild peril of a zom-nom-rom-com.

My web design comfort zone is usually sites that are quite subtle and typography-led, so I wanted to attempt something completely different. This homepage is visceral and illustrative, taking inspiration from the work of comic artist Mike Mignola (*Hellboy*) and films such as *Dead Snow* and *Shaun of the Dead*.

The intention behind this design is to offer an introduction to the game, to provide a solid foundation for viewing the site on a range of devices, and to offer rewards for repeated visits and social media engagement. If I was building the site today I'd use HTML5 to take full advantage of the ability to embed rich media items and section my content. Although the design is visually rich, most of the techniques employed – such as drop shadows, element rotation and custom fonts – could easily be accomplished in modern browsers using CSS.

With the game designed for the iPhone, the intention is for the site design to respond to viewing on smaller devices, defaulting to a single-column layout in narrower viewports.

I wanted the game itself to employ cel-shaded graphics like the classic XIII, so I composed a series of comic book-style illustrations, which were all inked up from pencil sketches using the Inkscape vector-drawing package.

Close up

1 Call to action Users want to know what platforms a game supports and where they can buy it. A clear, prominent link to the App Store means they know immediately that this game is for the iPhone.

2 Social media It's great when brands use social media to engage with their users (rather than just push links), so I wanted services such as Twitter and Facebook to be prominent parts of the marketing.

3 Video A video offers a quick, effective way of showcasing the gameplay. HTML5 means that we can offer this easily within a responsive site layout that doesn't require a proprietary plug-in such as Flash.

4 The blog I love it when a video game is set in a larger game universe and a blog provides the perfect opportunity to evoke this. It's also a chance to show viewers the work that goes into making the title.

5 User reviews Taking an interesting technique used on the Perch CMS website, tweets mentioning the game are favourited and aggregated here, providing a simple means of including user-generated content.

6 Screenshots While video is great for providing an impression of the game in action, nothing beats screenshots for offering a detailed glimpse of the design and artwork. A trusty lightbox showcases larger versions.

Expert info

Cole Henley's month

What have I been doing?
Since going freelance, I've been doing a lot of front-end development in ExpressionEngine and Perch. However, I've just started getting my teeth into a redesign of lourish.com's web app. This will be my first proper dabble with responsive web design.

Sites I've visited
Zootool (zootool.com) has proven to be indispensable for compiling and managing inspiring web flotsam. I've also been inspired by the attention to detail in paulrobertlloyd.com.

What have I been watching?
I recently watched – and thoroughly enjoyed – the first season of HBO's *Game of Thrones*.

What have I been listening to?
I've been revelling in John Powell's scores for the *Bourne* films. Also, the new Beastie Boys album and Unkle's latest remix offering, *Another Night Out*.

Have your say ...
Got a build-off suggestion? Let us know at feedback@netmagazine.com

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