

Usability Research of Exitium

By RSI

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Introduction

In this report, we'll be researching the usability of a stealth game app, Exitium, introduced to us through a short video of the gameplay itself. Exitium has the following features:

- The game itself consists of several levels in which you have to avoid guards to reach your objectives. You have three lives.
- Certain settings – music and sound – can be changed.
- Games can be saved and previously saved games can be loaded. There is one save slot.
- There is a high score system.

The usability will be researched through the use of test persons, who follow scenarios we provide in order to allow us to judge the execution of our test objectives, formulated in the Method. Their observations will be presented in the Results. The Conclusion will relate these observations to the previously mentioned test objectives, and suggestions for further development of the app are made in the Discussion.

Method

Test Objectives

1. How user-friendly are the controls?
2. How quickly does the user learn to use the app's main functionality?
3. How efficient is the saving/loading game system?
4. How effective is the design in setting the mood of the app?
5. How user friendly is the design?
 - a. Ease of use (obvious back/help buttons, etc)
 - b. Accessing high scores page, saved games page, etc
6. Is the story enjoyable?
7. Is it possible, but not too easy, to reach the end of the game?

Justification

Criteria

The five most common usability criteria are known as the five E's¹. They are, as found on the website mentioned on our Sources page:

- **Effective:** How completely and accurately the work or experience is completed or goals reached.
- **Efficient:** How quickly this work can be completed.
- **Engaging:** How well the interface draws the user into the interaction and how pleasant and satisfying it is to use.
- **Error Tolerant:** How well the product prevents errors and can help the user recover from mistakes that do occur.
- **Easy to Learn:** How well the product supports both the initial orientation and continued learning throughout the complete lifetime of use.

Relations to Test Objectives

1. This test objective relates most to the Engaging and Error Tolerant criteria. The controls need to be pleasant to use and able to handle the errors the user might make. Besides, they need to be immersive and add to the gameplay experience.
2. This test objective relates most to the Easy to Learn criteria. The app needs to be accessible for its entire target audience, some of whom may be new to stealth games such as this one.
3. This test objective relates most to the Effective and Efficient criteria. The process of saving and loading games needs to be functional, fast and easy to use.
4. This test objective relates most to the Engaging criteria. The interface needs to set the mood of the game and draw the user into the storyline.
5. This test objective relates most to the Effective, Error Tolerant and Easy to Learn criteria. The design of the app should allow the user to access menu's at any time when the user might need to, and back/undo buttons should be present in case the user clicked a button on accident.
6. This test objective relates most to the Engaging criteria. The creators of this app advertised the app as unique partly due to its backstory, therefore it does need to be enjoyable and comprehensible, and it has to add to the game.
7. This test objective relates most to the Engaging criteria. The difficulty of the app needs to be well-balanced, so that it's possible to complete the game, but not too easy.

Scenarios

- Try to start a new game and play the first level.
- Try to save a game.
- Try to load that saved game.
- Try to see some of your high scores.
- Try to change the sound/music settings.
- Try to die.

Results

These are the results of our Thinking-Out-Loud test, courtesy of the test persons credited in our Sources. They will be presented in English, but the quotes will be in Dutch, as our test was conducted in Dutch.

Nathan

Nathan had some trouble with the sound sliders and he needed some time to figure out how to use the controls, as there was no tutorial.

“Het is me niet echt duidelijk hoe de controls werken, je begint gewoon. Uiteindelijk krijg je het wel door door gewoon een beetje uitproberen.”

“Soms als ik naar boven wil lopen zit ik met m’n duim over het poppetje zodat ik mezelf niet meer kan zien. Dat is niet zo handig.”

“Ik heb moeite met het klikken op die knoppen.”

When his character died and the game was over, he didn’t understand what had happened, as he didn’t think he had been spotted and no message with a cause of death was displayed. Also, the game immediately started over, without an option to go to the main menu or an explanation.

“Oh ik ben doodgegaan, maar ik had niet door waardoor ik ben doodgegaan eigenlijk.”

“En nu begin ik meteen weer bij level 1?”

When it came to high scores, he wanted to see his high score from within the game. As this wasn’t possible, he decided to go back to the main menu, but the QUIT button in the pause menu closed the entire app, and so did using the Android phone’s standard back button. When he restarted the app, it opened on the main menu, so now he could go to the high scores tab. However, he found those empty. Apparently, high scores aren’t saved after getting a Game Over, only after winning the game.

“Er staat geen high score in het level ergens, dus ik moet denk ik terug naar het hoofdmenu.

En dat kan niet in 1 keer blijikbaar. Dus ik moet eerst de hele app afsluiten als ik terug wil gaan naar het hoofdmenu.”

“Ik heb geen high score?”

All in all, Nathan did enjoy the game, but thought that major improvements could be the additions of a Main Menu button as well as a tutorial.

Awend

Awend thought the question mark in the corner, which was the pause/settings button, was a tutorial. He hoped it would help him figure out the controls, which were somewhat finicky.

"Dus wat is de besturing? Hey een vraagteken. Ah ja daar heb ik dus ook niet zo veel aan."

"Ik heb een beetje gemixte gevoelens over de besturing. Op het ene moment werkt het wel, op het andere moment reageert het opeens niet meer."

He did like the fact that there really was a storyline throughout the game, although he had hoped for a little more context explaining the goals of the game.

"Oh dat was een korte intro, ik had wel iets meer verwacht."

"Ik vind het wel mooi dat er echt een verhaal in zit."

"Ik ben wel benieuwd naar welke dingen ik nou moet zoeken voor informatie."

He tried to scout ahead when his character was standing in a safe spot, which was not possible.

"Kun je de camera, Nee je kunt de camera niet bewegen."

After saving the game, he couldn't start exactly where he'd saved – instead, he started at the beginning of the level he had been playing. And when he started a new game after saving with a score of 0, his score at the start of the new game was 0, too. (It's supposed to start out high and decrease as you waste time.)

"Oh je begint weer in het begin. Je kunt dus niet midden in het level opslaan."

"Ik heb gesaved met een score van nul, dus als je new game doet begin je met nul terwijl de score terug hoort te lopen."

Awend had trouble opening the high scores from within the game, just like Nathan.

"Ja, die kan ik hier niet zien. Moet ik nog een keer doodgaan? Even kijken.. Kan je daar echt naar toe? Ik kan het niet vinden."

In short, Awend enjoyed the fact that there was a coherent storyline but would have liked some more explanation of his character's goals. He thought the game might be improved by adding a tutorial for the controls, fixing the score bug and the ability to see high scores from within the game.

Wouter

Wouter figured out the controls rather fast, he only had a bit of trouble because he was using both hands, which at times confused his character.

“Wacht is het ook multi-touch? ...nee. Balen.”

He enjoyed the story, but could have used some more directions on what to do in the first level.

“Leuk verhaal!”

“Oke, wat moet ik doen eigenlijk.”

“Oh, daar moet ik waarschijnlijk niet– moet ik daarheen? Huh? Oh – ik ben af. Ik weet niet echt waar ik heen moet.”

“Wat is het doel eigenlijk? Kan ik dat ergens lezen?”

When he accidentally pressed the home button he found out the hard way that saving didn't happen automatically, and he had to start over.

“Dat vind ik echt niet cool gewoon.”

When asked to go to his high scores, he found that the QUIT button closed the entire app, and high scores weren't saved automatically. He also noticed that 'high scores' was misspelled.

“Dat vind ik wel jammer. Er is ook geen knop return to main menu”

“High scores is met h-i-g-h.”

“Heet het exitium omdat je de hele tijd de app uit moet om naar het main menu te gaan?”

He did like the soundtrack.

“Het is wel catchy muziek.”

Like Awend, he wanted to scout ahead while waiting but found this an unsupported feature.

“Ik vind het wel vervelend dat als je even moet wachten je niet kan kijken waar je naar toe moet.”

In short, Wouter enjoyed the storyline and the soundtrack but would have liked some more explanation on what to do in the first level. He thought the game might be improved by adding a tutorial and a working QUIT button, as well as automatic saving.

Conclusion

Our test objectives were:

1. How user-friendly are the controls?
2. How quickly does the user learn to use the app's main functionality?
3. How efficient is the saving/loading game system?
4. How effective is the design in setting the mood of the app?
5. How user friendly is the design?
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 - b. Accessing high scores page, saved games page, etc
6. Is the story enjoyable?
7. Is it possible, but not too easy, to reach the end of the game?

The test results indicated the following:

1. The controls themselves are quite user-friendly, and implemented in the same way that many other stealth games do. However, as there is no explanation or tutorial present, if a user is new to games such as this, they might have trouble figuring out how to use them.
2. The app's main functionality is the game itself. The user learns how to use this rather quick, although, as mentioned in the analysis of the previous test objective, this would be easier if a tutorial was present. Also, some of our test persons had trouble figuring out what the goal of the first level was and what they were supposed to do.
3. The saving game system works as the developers intended. However, our test subjects mentioned that they would prefer to have automatic saving of their progress, and to be able to start right where they left off instead of at the start of the level where they saved. In addition to this, if you save a game with a score of zero then start a new game, you start out with zero points, although the score is supposed to start out high and decrease slowly.
4. The design is quite effective in setting the mood of the game. It takes place in what, according to the story, is the dungeon of a castle, with a dark, somber, well-chosen background. The suspenseful music adds to the atmosphere too.
5. The design is mostly user-friendly, with sliders for sound volume and the pause button in the top left of the screen – a traditional choice, and therefore easy to find for users. However, there is one flaw: the inability to go back to the main menu once you've started the game. This means that the app must be closed every time a user wishes to access their high scores load a previously saved game, or start a new game. All our test persons found this inconvenient.
6. All our test persons found the story enjoyable.
7. Only one of our test persons came close to reaching the end of the first level. As this was their first time playing this game, that is understandable, so the difficulty of the first level is good. It is not possible to judge the rest of the game.

Discussion

Although the game already is enjoyable, and the design suits the mood quite well, there are several suggestions to be made which could improve this app. The most poignant ones are listed below.

- We suggest adding a tutorial to explain the controls, perhaps in the form of a short introductory level with explanations on the controls and the enemies. This could also help users understand their purpose in each level, leaving them not quite so lost in level 1 as they are now.
- A button allowing the user to return to the main menu would be appreciated. All our test persons remarked that this was something they missed, as the lack of one made it harder for them to load a previously saved game or access their high scores.
- It might also be a good idea to have automatic saving, or at least make the saving system save the user's exact location instead of having them restart at the beginning of the level they were in when they saved.

Sources

¹Quesenberry, W. (n.d.). Using the 5Es to Understand Users - Whitney Interactive Design. Retrieved June 15, 2016, from <http://www.wqusability.com/articles/getting-started.html>

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