

Creative workshop

Create a web interface for a PS3 game

Designer **Shane Mielke** deconstructs the layout of 2Advanced Studio's new Sony *Ratchet and Clank* global website

On the following pages I share the design process behind the new website for the latest instalment of Sony's *Ratchet and Clank* franchise (www.ratchetandclank.com).

As well as looking at the concepts behind some of the key site elements, I explain how two unique designs were created by 2Advanced Studios (www.2advanced.com), and then merged into the final product.

Based on the client's brief, we put together two homepage concepts for Sony Computer Entertainment America. Associate creative director Elder Jerez Jr. created the first, and I contributed the second. Both designs were executed individually, using some general assets such as logos, fonts, character renders, box art and game screenshots, and past versions of the game were played extensively to familiarise ourselves with the product, characters, branding and storyline.

It's important to note that, for this project, the homepage comprehensives were designed prior to any detailed wireframes. This kept restrictions at a minimum and save time, while also leaving the layouts and creative possibilities open. In the end, the client liked aspects of both, and we merged both in the final design.



Shane Mielke

Creative director at 2Advanced Studios in California, Mielke specialises in graphic design, Flash, motion and more, and has worked with clients such as EA, Adobe, Nintendo and Warner Brothers. www.shanemielke.com

Skills

- Create the design and layout of an interface
- Design custom 3D elements
- Construct interactive modules

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Concept one

Drawing inspiration from the angularity of the logo and the game user interface, the main navigation of the first homepage concept spreads out evenly in a modular, octagonal pattern. Modular panels angled at 45° filled out the layout below.

The *Ratchet and Clank* universe contains multiple game titles dating back to 2002. This design allows users to casually explore at a high level, and then interact with content as they drill down to a specific title.

To accommodate the large database of content featured on the site, a hybrid build-approach was conceptualised. Large visuals with quick page loads, intelligent usage of Flash and a predominantly HTML and CSS foundation were envisioned.



The *Ratchet and Clank* franchise takes its audience through epic interstellar adventures. The design process across the project focused on creating a sense of depth and grandeur.

The *Ratchet and Clank* franchise branding is consistently vivid and colourful. To further accentuate these tones, this interface makes use of a palette of greys, which allows the artwork to stand out in contrast.

Concept two

The environments of the franchise are awe-inspiring. The goal with the top portion of the second homepage concept was to create a wide-open panoramic window into the *Ratchet and Clank* universe. This area would immediately feature the main characters, drawing the user in.

The website needed to reflect the playful nature of the storyline, so both the header and navigation here are formed from weapons and objects found in the game. The intention was to create a unique structure where bolts and gears animate to create a playful, yet subtle, environment.



To create an interactive component on the homepage, the site's sections and features are positioned in a large gear-like platform. Each item reacts on rollover to draw the user deeper into the *Ratchet and Clank* experience.

The lower promotions and news areas were kept very simple and modular in this version so that future features would be easy to update. The site is published across 21 different languages, so ease-of-update was an important requirement from the Sony development team.

Bolts are gathered and used in the game to purchase weapons, upgrades and armour. Inspired by that, a bolt counter was designed here, so that clicking on various Flash buttons and objects throughout the site keeps a constant tally on the total number of bolts collected, unlocking hidden content.

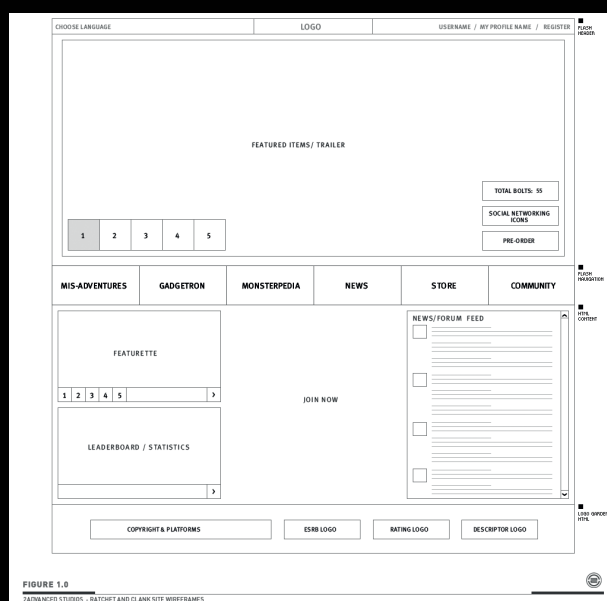


FIGURE 1.8
TECHNOLOGY STUDIOS - RATCHET AND CLANK SITE WIREFRAMES

01 After the initial design set, I developed wireframes for the entire site based upon ideas conceptualised in both homepage designs, and the content Sony would have available for launch. Since the overall styles were already designed, this made the process of organising the content much easier.



02 Using artwork provided by the client, custom 3D assets were created by senior art director Baz Pringle. Custom assets allow greater control over a project, but also increase the risk of client rejection if objects are not rendered exactly as is in the game.



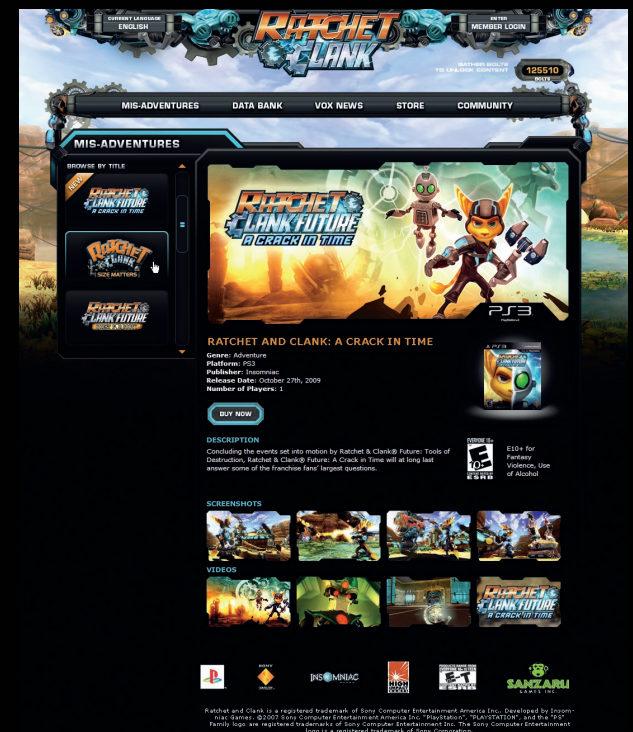
03 Next, I created the navigation elements from weapons and objects cut out of screenshots and renders from the client. This helped the client relate to the design elements a lot more than the custom assets did. The shape of the border was kept unique and interesting, so that the design would feel playful and in keeping with the personality of the *Ratchet and Clank* brand.



04 The client chose the bordering from Elder's homepage concept as the style to be fleshed out for the content areas. I created a style guide from those elements, crafting reusable components such as panels, buttons and content overlays. Establishing these elements early on makes it easier to design the rest of a site.

Stay focused

Try to execute the majority of your style and page designs at one time. Revisiting design elements even a week or two later can lead to disjointed design elements, because your personal style and inspirations change over time.



05 The design needed to accommodate all nine releases of the *Ratchet and Clank* series. As mentioned, it was therefore important to keep the layout simple so that it could support 21 different languages, all with different information, box art, regional game ratings, screenshots and videos.



06_____ Inspired by the game, the Data Bank section allows the user to explore all things *Ratchet and Clank* by visiting different planets in the universe. Key areas include Monsterpedia and Gadgetron, which allow the user to browse the monsters, weapons and gear used in all nine titles.

Don't stop

When you get stuck in the design process, switch to tasks such as masking products or wireframe creation. This helps you stay productive, prevents you from staring at a blank canvas and will ultimately free your mind.



07_____ Using the previously established hexagon-style grid, the Gadgetron section of the Data Bank also mimics the current UI design for weapon selection in *Ratchet and Clank: A Crack in Time*. The goal was to make this section look, feel and animate like the in-game menu experience.

Know your client

With new clients it's important to be a good listener. Before you design for them you have to be able to admit you don't know their goals, style or personalities. It really pays to keep your ego in check and give the client what they want – not just what you want to design for them.

When starting a project, it's important to figure out who the decision-makers are, get to know their personal preferences and then give them exactly what they want, with your own personal style mixed in.



08_____ The game is based around Ratchet and Clank running around destroying crates for bolts and ammo. To tie into that theme, 21 language options were haphazardly stacked as crates in front of a scene from the current game title. Upon selection of a location, the crates explode, revealing the scene behind.



09_____ To add more interest, I devised an interactive environmental footer. The footer contains unique environments and enemies from the current game. Playing off the existing game strategy, destroying crates and enemies updates the user's bolt count in the header, promoting site exploration to unlock content.



10_____ The final subpage design creates a unique environment that moves from space to planetary level while telling a visual story. Background and footer elements can be changed on a sectional, game title or page level, giving the client unique thematic control.