Introduction

In setting out to redesign the BBCi homepage we knew we were tackling a hard task. Many people use and love our homepage, so we know that any changes we make will evoke a strong reaction. We needed to balance the needs of these users with the needs of our own business. We needed to satisfy a large number of people with a range of different objectives, both inside and outside the BBC. Any solution requires us to make decisions, but we believe that we have at least made informed choices to ensure a sensitive evolution of the page.

We wanted to make a clear step change with the design of the page without alienating the users. To begin with we looked at the way people use the current page using click-throughs and the way they feel about it through emotional response testing. We looked at how people build up relationships with the services and objects they use on a daily basis. This helped us address the issues we saw in all elements of the homepage, including the main story. Throughout the process, we benefited from continual user testing and internal feedback.

We believe that the resulting page will feel familiar to our existing users, but through digital patina, balanced design and excellent functionality, we also believe we have given it soul.

The Glass Wall which gave us the title of this book was the centre of the project. Most of our discussions were visualised on the wall and its location at the entrance to the studio ensured everyone could see what was going on and contribute.

This book aims to give some background on the process we followed and covers the redesign from its early stages in May 2002 up until launch in November 2002.
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Launch
BBCi history
The BBC homepage has been through three major changes in its life, most recently the launch of BBCi in November 2001. Along the way it has seen many ideas and concepts for new brands and radical layouts.

The early years of BBC Online up to 1997

Launched in 1998

Run up to 2001 relaunch

One of many iterations of a new design

The ‘new look’ launched autumn 2001

One of many iterations of a new design

Diversions

The history
Objectives for the redesign - August 2002

Homepage objectives
- To be the starting point for users when they log onto the web.
- To be a place where we connect to our audiences.
- To be an easy, trusted and fast way for users to get to what they’re looking for.
- To get people to set www.bbc.co.uk as their homepage.

Areas needing attention

The categories list may not be the best we can do.
Action: re-examine what goes here and how it appears.

The search box was not originally part of the page design and was added later.
Action: reconsider its position in relation to the page elements around it.

The pulldown under the TV and RADIO box is too long - usability issue.
Action: look for another solution.

The panel called Where I Live does not support the functionality that is planned for this area.
Action: rethink this area.

Other objectives
- The November 2001 redesign created a new look and a new design voice that has filtered through to other areas of the site and been further developed (e.g. Lifestyles and Nature). If the homepage is to remain consistent and coherent it needs to catch up.

- Some design changes are needed to inject a little more ‘soul’ into the page.

All the above points mean that a significant proportion of the page needs attention. It would make sense to reconsider the page as a whole.
Understanding phase
Understanding phase

Emotional response testing
A little more soul

"Everybody expresses far more than he understands." Marshall McLuhan

One of the aims of the 2002 homepage redesign was to inject a little more ‘soul’ into the page. This idea emerged from feedback about the 2001 homepage which was labelled functional but perhaps a little clinical in look and feel.

In order to do this we wanted to go beyond function and pursue the emotional, expressive, suggestive and engaging aspects of the user experience, possibly something beyond visual aesthetics and brand.

There are many reasons why people love a website apart from how it looks. We wanted to find out whether individuals like, love, hate or were indifferent to our homepage and why.

Ultimately, we wanted to identify things to guide us in designing something to which people might say - "I love this homepage!"
Talking to users

Our findings were based upon the experiences of eight users interacting and exploring the current BBCi homepage in one-on-one sessions with our designers.

First a warm-up exercise looked at participants’ visual awareness and preferences using existing BBCi web pages. These were chosen from sections around the site such as Food and Entertainment. Participants were asked to group together paper screenshots of these on the floor. Some of these designs follow a visual style and language (for example, the Lifestyles pages) whilst others are more individual in their presentation. This exercise gave an indication that participants recognised a ‘family’ of design styles. What also came out clearly was the visual impact of high quality photographic imagery as a focus of attention, such as those used in the BBC One and Lifestyle pages.

Direct comparisons between the current BBCi homepage and seven other homepages including participants’ own personal favourites. Their emotional responses and reactions were observed, along with their moods, desires and feelings. They were also asked questions such as "What was your first impression when you saw this homepage?". Whilst looking at the pages they also scored their response against our bi-polar emotional response scale of eleven word pairs: bright/dull; professional/amateur; light/heavy; ugly/pretty; dramatic/understated etc. This gave an interesting additional quantifiable measure of emotional experience.
Measuring human emotional response is tricky. How do we know whether interaction with our website will result in the experience intended? What kind of information or inspiration do designers need and how do we get it?

In the example here users were asked to plot their response to an individual homepage using dots. When the responses from all the users were put together they created the patterns shown on the next page.
What we found

Patterns and shapes can be seen when the emotional response test data is presented graphically.

When people's test scores are grouped by site, users' personal favourites and the BBCi homepage look very similar. Patterns for scores from the other sites varied a lot more in their shape.

Some were thinner and straight with scores concentrated down the median, such as AOL and MSN. We interpret this as an indifference to the visual design. However, people may still like a site based on its functionality and what it does for them rather than how it looks.

Some sites showed more extreme and varied emotional response scores e.g. Yahoo shows a particularly fat even shape. This indicates a strong reaction that is inconsistent between people. Their views vary and the way they feel about the look is very different.

From this work we believe that we can gauge in a useful way reactions to visual design to aid the design process.
Understanding phase

Voice mapping
Voice mapping

Voice mapping allowed us to look at the design, visual language and brand voice within the space BBCi occupies among its direct and indirect competitors. The result is a visual representation of our product’s environment and is a great way of seeing how design and visual language can mould and position our own product through comparison with others.

In the exercise shown on the next page, the design team chose two pairs of words and placed them on the vertical and horizontal axes. The words were chosen very carefully in order to help us understand the message we are sending our users. We plotted a range of other sites on the same scale in order to compare the various messages.

We found that our existing page sits alone in a part of the voice map that is fairly devoid of character and colour. This confirmed our thoughts that our page needed more soul, more individuality.
Understanding phase
Personas
Homepage design - an introduction to personas

Why use personas?
A persona is a user archetype that we can use to help guide decisions about a product’s visual design, features, navigation and interactions. By designing for an archetype - whose goals and behaviour patterns we understand - we can satisfy the broader group of people represented by that archetype. Our personas are based on the BBCi target audience as defined by Audience Research non-trialists as well as our existing user base.

Personas:
• are fictitious people for whom we are designing
• represent the archetypal qualities of our audience
• provide a focus for design, thereby humanising the design process
• are tools for thinking about features and functions.

Personas were developed in daily workshops and captured in brief descriptions that include behaviour patterns, goals, skills, attitudes net usage and environment, with a few fictional personal details to bring the persona to life. Associated mood boards were also made.

From the personas developed, we have identified a ‘primary persona’, the archetype, a persona whom, if satisfied, means others will more likely be satisfied. Our final personas are summarised in a table.

Reference:
This approach to the development and use of personas closely follows the method advocated by Alan Cooper in his book “The Inmates are running the Asylum”.
BBCi personas - Mandy Daniels

36 years old, Mousy blonde (treats herself to highlights), 5’4”, medium/mum build – goes to the gym. Lives in Northampton with her partner Rob and their two sons, Jason and Liam. Rob drives a delivery van and Mandy is a part-time supervisor at Asda. They enjoy nights out at the pub (where Rob is a member of the quiz team) and watching TV - Mandy prefers Eastenders while Rob likes any sport and Channel 5 crime documentaries. She’s really into DIY. They don’t get holidays abroad every year so they’re saving hard for a family trip to Florida where Mandy and Rob also hope to get married.

TV
Eastenders and other soaps, Cutting It, Holiday, Watchdog. Has applied to be on Changing Rooms several times.

Reads
The Sun, Good Food Magazine, TV Quick

Internet usage
Doesn’t get much time to use it but when she does, it’s often in the early afternoon, before the kids get home from school. She uses AOL to send emails to her sister and has recently started buying books for her kids from Amazon. Mandy could live without the internet. She can’t really see what all the fuss is about. Some afternoons she uses AOL’s recipe finder and she has tried the home improvement service, although she prefers magazines for the latter. Rob tends to dominate the internet in the evenings, when he visits the Northampton Town FC website. He has also used the interactive football service on Sky Sports Active and now the BBC’s FA Cup Service.
**BBCi personas - Derek Jones**

39 years old, scruffy brown hair, moustache, reasonably fit but with and a bit of a beer belly. He has a wife (Dawn) two kids (aged 12 and 15). He works as a self-employed electrician in Cardiff and goes to the pub three nights a week. His kids mean that he doesn’t get a look-in on the internet very often. He logs on four or five times a month, for about half an hour per session. Derek is currently tracing his family tree and this is the main thing he uses the internet for.

**TV**
Sky Sports and News, ITN News at Ten, films, Channel 5 police chase documentaries. Uses Teletext to check football and rugby scores, so doesn’t visit news or sports websites.

**Technology**
He has a mobile phone with a separate ring tone for business calls. Has a Sky set-top-box but doesn’t often get to watch it as his kids dominate their main TV (has to choose from the terrestrial channels on a portable TV in the kitchen instead).

**Internet usage**
He has an email address - provided by his ISP, Freeserve - which he now includes in his Yellow Pages advert. Recently visited the 1901 Census website (heard about it from a friend). He’s never visited a chat room or sent an instant message but he knows his 12-year-old daughter does both, and it worries him. His kids print off any emails he receives as they are online every day. Last summer he found a cheap flight to Turkey through Expedia.co.uk, having followed a link from MSN, which his son has set as their homepage. MSN ‘is’ the internet, as far as Derek is concerned. He uses the search box to find what he wants, although he knows the URL of sites such as familytreesearcher.com and multimap.co.uk. Sometimes a story on the front of MSN will catch his eye and he’ll click on it.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Desc/Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steven Annis</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Hull</td>
<td>Student (HND) Has part time job</td>
<td>Used for essays and research at Uni. Games, Music and surfing at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Evans</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Wolverhampton</td>
<td>Owner of Computer Support Company</td>
<td>PC home/work, PDA (iPaq) Loves technology, Has DSat. Expert.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosy Sykes</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>Aberdeen</td>
<td>Retired, widowed, volunteer worker</td>
<td>Mainly email occasional web usage, son’s old computer in spare bedroom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITV usage</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steven Annis</td>
<td>Uses quizzes such as Test the Nation and Digital Text and Walking with Beasts Interactive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Evans</td>
<td>Uses the Sky Sport, News Interactive, F1 Racing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosy Sykes</td>
<td>NONE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internet usage</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steven Annis</td>
<td>Medium, couple of hours a day usage. Mailing, IM/ICQ and web for research in to interests and degree. Freeserve, Google, Amazon, Fan Sites, Listings, Cinema, Games &amp; Porn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Evans</td>
<td>Constant usage, broadband at home and work. Heavy email use, email newsletters, gofly.com, Sainsburys.co.uk, stock and shares ticker, Amazon, car sites. Uses internet as daily life tool.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosy Sykes</td>
<td>One hour a week to email son in Korea. Has used Radio 4 site to email programmes and .gov sites for local issues. 1901 Census from newspaper story</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BBC ITV usage</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steven Annis</td>
<td>Did the national IQ test, uses the local Hull News section and some of the Blue Ocean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Evans</td>
<td>Uses all the FA Cup and Rugby multi-screen looking forward to the Wimbledon. Uses News Interactive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosy Sykes</td>
<td>NONE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BBC website usage</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steven Annis</td>
<td>BBCi: H2G2. Message Boards “not” chat, cult buffy, doctor who, star trek. Student issues. Used to use Bitesize and Education services while doing GCSE’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Evans</td>
<td>News (his homepage) and sport, just discovered BBCi search - likes it. BBCi house buying mortgage, Motoring, Watchdog, Weather.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosy Sykes</td>
<td>Radio 4 and Gardening.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trigger</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steven Annis</td>
<td>He has seen a promo for message boards at the end of Buffy and wants to chat all things Buffy. But only used once for the chance to win videos. Saw the trailers for Test the Nation or generally try pressing the RED key.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Evans</td>
<td>Picks up URL trails after Top Gear, triggers mostly Lifestyle and Business related.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosy Sykes</td>
<td>From trailers on BBC2 and Radio 4, BBC Gardening Magazine and Radio Times.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ultimate goal</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steven Annis</td>
<td>Look knowledgeable and interesting to his friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Evans</td>
<td>Be in control of life and business, efficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosy Sykes</td>
<td>To still be an active member of society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica Barnesworth</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandy Daniels</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonty Hudson</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRIMARY PERSONA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECONDARY PERSONA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Understanding phase
Mood boards
Mood boards are a very basic but highly effective tool. They work as an extension of personas, creating an immediate, understandable, visual reference for each one. In this capacity they allow people who have not been involved in the persona development process to get a flavour of them without having to read through all the details.

The boards are created from magazine cuttings selected to represent the persona’s interests, lifestyles and media consumption. These images range from pictures of the clothes they wear, the house they live in, the type of programmes they watch to the type of mobile phone they use. Mandy’s board for example contains images of packed lunches (for her kids), a Ford focus, sensible clothes, a common Nokia phone, celebrity gossip, and a Bridget Jones’s diary film poster.

Whilst the boards are a fairly crude tool they can be instrumental in turning a paper-thin persona into a well-rounded character with greater depth and texture than words alone can provide.
Derek’s mood board
Concept phase
2 Questions

To instigate the concept phase of the project we asked ourselves two questions:

**Question 1 What do you do when you arrive somewhere new?**

With this question we took the metaphor of travel as a starting point for our concept work. For users like persona Mandy the Internet is still a relatively unfamiliar environment, and the BBCi homepage is entirely new. So in the same way that when you travel to a new location in the world there are things that you need to help you get around, equally there must be similar things which would help you through your journey on the web.

**Question 2 What could the homepage be?**

To answer this question we broke it down into three sub-questions and then brainstormed each with a large group of design, technical and editorial team members.

The three sub-questions were:

- What is the BBCi homepage’s voice?
- How can we serve people with the BBCi homepage?
- What experience do you want to get from BBCi?
Question 1
What do you do when you arrive somewhere new?
Question 2
What could the page be?
WHAT IS THE BBCi HOMEPAGE’S VOICE?

- SMILE
- DIFFERENT
- FAMILIAR
- WISE
- CALM
- OMNIPRESENT
- CONCISE
- DEPENDABLE
- WHISPER
- TIME DEPENDENT
- CONSCIENCE
- DIALECTS/ACCENTS
- (NOT) AUNTY
- SHOUT
- DIFFERENT
- MINIMALISTIC
- FRIENDLY
- CELEBRATORY
- APPEARANCE
- EXPRESSIVE
- INFORMED
- IN TOUCH
- MODERN
- TRADITIONAL
- TRUSTWORTHY
- QUILT
- JOHN PEEL
- JOHN PEEL
- TIME DEPENDENT
- CONSCIENCE
- CULTURAL SPECIFICITY
- DIALECTS/ACCENTS
- EXPRESSIVE
- CONCISE
- PLAIN
- SIMPLE
- CHATTY
- DIRECTING
- POETIC
- GRAMMATICALLY CORRECT
- NOT PATRONISING
- EXCITABLE
- STRONG
- RELAXING
- VOLUME CONTROL
- LOUD
- QUICK
- QUIET
- PERSONAL
- ACCURATE
- VOLUME CONTROL
- WISE
HOW CAN WE SERVE PEOPLE WITH THE BBCi HOMEPAGE?

FLASH SPLASH OF WHOLE OF BBCi (like an ad)

ALL THE BBC BRAND LOGOS

SIGNs

words

pictures

SHELVES/SUPERMARKET

A GUIDE

Smiley face

Taken by the hand

BBC Character

From TV

New

A 'HUB' LIST GROUP

BIG PAGE OF KIT (buttons)

PHOTO GALLERY

STORY/BOOK

ORIENTATE IT MY WAY

MAP

GAME

LIFESTYLES

“WHAT DO YOU WANT?”

SHoPPING BASKET

MOSAIC

CAR DASHBOARD

ONE BIG PHONE NUMBER

DIARY

CALL TO ARMS

CONTROL PANEL

JUST SEARCH AND RESULTS

Big Search Box

Big Search Box

JOURNEY/TOUR

SIMPLE, CLEAR STATEMENT OF WHAT BBCi OFFERS

DIARY

of site

of person

CONTROL PANEL

OUTLOOK BAR

Directories

LIST OF THINGS TO DO

STORAGE

BBC EVENTS

ALPHABETICAL LIST OF EVERYTHING
Emerging themes

After our initial brainstorm ideas had been grouped, it became clear that they could further be bracketed into three overarching themes. These themes are ‘environment’, ‘conversation’ and ‘layers’. Each theme is explained in more detail on the following pages.

It is important to note that these themes are not mutually exclusive. As the project has progressed they have become more and more entwined both theoretically and visually. They are defined individually here to clarify the original directions our concept work took.
Environment

Conversation
Action - Response - Interruption

Confusion

SHOUTING

Interruption
Environment

We broke ‘environment’ down into several sub themes.

· Structures - aerial views of cities/ floor plans/ grids/ maps.

· Networks and neighbourhoods – how things are connected and feed into each other. People gravitating towards areas which relate to their existing behavioural patterns.

· Orientation – how you understand where you are and what you need to do.

· Comfort and safety – derived largely from the travel analogy. Massively important to Mandy-type users.

· Labelling/ signage – pictorial/linguistic importance in making things recognisable and familiar.

· Framing - the familiar can be exciting and new. You can take a microcosm of something huge and it is given context and clarity.

Conversation

Rather than human-to-computer interaction we felt the page should reflect a human-to-human conversation. Human conversation involves interruptions, gestures, eye contact, turn-taking and exchange of ideas. Over time, this can create a level of intimacy allowing more and more information to be communicated in fewer and fewer words.

It was our intention to create a homepage which encouraged the conversation and relationship between the user and the homepage to grow over time, appealing to individual needs and interests.
Layers
Translucent - Transparent
Light - Filters - Depth

Dawn - Gloomy, Glisteny
Dusk - Smokey
Midday - Bright, Sunshiny
Nighttime - Dark, Heavy, atmospheric

Areas/Environments
Dancefloor (Euphoric, Energy, Movement)
Bar (Social, Chatting)
Restaurant (Satiety, Nourishing, Social, Intimate)
Chillout (Relaxing, Mellow, Soft)
Library (Quiet, Educational, Organised, Calm)

Intensity - Blurred in Light - Reflection - Projection

Cool - Warm

Looking in - Lounge in someone's home - Bar - Eclectic
Looking out - City - Country - No view (brick wall)
Space - Cluttered - Inviting - Clinical

Dusk - Dawn - Smokey - Atmospheric - Rainy - Foggy - Smoggy
Weather - Sunny - Rainy - Foggy - Cloudy - Smoggy
Dappled Sun - Snow
Layers and transparency

Ideas relating to 'layers and transparency' were instrumental in our early discussions and sparked our early visual development. They break down into two main sub-themes:

**Transparency**
- How can we make everything accessible?
- How can we present lots of information without bombarding or overwhelming users?

**Layers**
- Providing information at different depths in line with users’ needs.
- Enabling users to filter information either consciously or subconsciously.

We concluded that we wanted to find a middle ground between covert system adaptation (like 'Amazon recommends') and user manual choice ('I want this, I want that').
Mega themes

This diagram maps our ideas spatially. It’s best viewed as a target or vortex with the stronger themes gravitating toward the centre.
A well-worn path

One of our objectives during the redesign was to create a page that people would feel comfortable with. We wanted to create a page where a user would feel at home and that they would adopt as his or her own homepage. It had to have character as well as appearing to respond to them. Or even mould itself around them...

Just like a pair of shoes really.
Come and play

A pin-board area made of cork was put up on the glass wall. Random images and words were printed on a variety of different papers (trace, white and acetate) and then pinned up with an open invitation to ‘come and play’. The idea behind it was to extend the theme of layers and transparency into a more literal, ‘hands-on’ experience.

The exercise allowed people to get involved with the project, and in the few weeks the board was up new combinations of images and text were constantly being created.
Concept Phase

Promo treatment - version 1
Promo development across BBCi

The visual language developed during the last homepage redesign has continued to evolve as it has filtered through the site's layers. These image-led areas serve a greater purpose than simply promoting the site content. With their visual weight and treatment they can create a stylistic/thematic lead for the whole page. Effectively they are responsible for the immediate visual impact and tone the page emits, and as such are hugely important.

The examples shown here display some of the ways that the previous homepage's promo treatment has been used, adapted and improved to suit different sites. Particularly obvious elements in these examples are the bolder crops, depth of colours and segmented landscape formats. This type of stylistic evolution became a major lead for the initial visual development of the new homepage.
Promo development
For the homepage redesign we wanted to explore possible new promo treatments.
Promo development

This is the title
A transparent object, especially a photographic slide that is viewed by light shining through it from behind or by projection. Also transparency.

How to be a gardener
It's not magic, it's common sense. I can't promise you a copper-bottomed guarantee, but I can help you to learn how to avoid the pitfalls and make the most of what you've got in your backyard.
Layered box promo storyboard

This storyboard demonstrates a treatment of multiple promos in one space. The promos are layered so that they are all visible but the user has to roll over them to bring them to the front (the actual promo was built in Director).

This treatment could be used on either multiple themes or multiple angles of one theme.
Promo development over time

We wanted to develop a promo treatment that could be used for events where the story has more than one angle, or one where more information gradually becomes available (a major breaking news story or an important sporting event, for example).

The grid design shown here allows content to be added gradually, resulting in a multi-faceted visual record of the event.

This is technically simple to implement because it is using static html but the resulting promo proved to be too heavy for daily use.
Another variation on a promo that develops over time was built in Director so that the layers gradually fade in and out. The subject could be any topic for which new content could be introduced as the day progressed.

In this example new pictures or reviews about ‘Spider-Man’ from around the site (e.g. /films/radio1/Birmingham or /whatson) could be introduced. Different aspects of the theme could be explored from one site e.g. reviews, actor blogs, cast/crew interviews, listings etc.
Multi promo

The promo box changes several times a day. This has the slight disadvantage that it is possible for people to see a promo they like and would like to return to later in the day, only to find that it has changed to a different one.

A design was developed where all four promos are exhibited all day, as a type of channel selector. The thumbnail images allow the user to navigate to the story of their choice.

Constructing the promo box in Flash allowed us to provide movement and layering of text and image. When the thumbnail image is clicked on it becomes the central feature with the associated text layered on top.

We’ve put this idea on hold because of implementation and maintenance issues.
Concept phase
Structure treatment
Early structural development was heavily tied into the ‘layers’ concept. Basic wireframes were focused on variations of how the various page elements fed into each other and fitted logically together.

Specific attention was paid to the balance and relationship between the applications (search, postcoder) and content areas of the page.
Structure development
The grid

The whole page was designed on a grid. This provides flexibility and enables the relationship between each area of information to remain organised, clear and consistent.
Setting the tone

When the new promo was placed within the grid design it became obvious that different images had a huge impact on the page. It was decided that the overall colour of the homepage should be driven by the main promo image. Therefore the colour of the page would change each time the promo was updated.
Areas of focus -
the digital patina

If the colour of the whole page could change, would it not be possible to allow the user’s interaction to ‘wear a path’ in certain areas of the homepage? It meant that the saturation of the most commonly used part of the page (for each individual) would subtly become more intense over time. Whilst retaining all the content it would be possible to have a more direct conversation with the user thus providing a richer and more relevant experience.
Design iterations 1
Design iterations 2
Search

In an attempt to make BBCi the central hub of the users’ online experience, the importance of search cannot be underestimated.

A good, solid and functional area of page real-estate was needed and where better than the top-left corner of the page? This is the area which the user sees first, and as our goal is to enable the users to find content quicker this makes perfect sense.

We toyed with the idea of displaying an image associated with the top search. But the context of a user’s search is all-important. The notion of searching for the country of Jordan but instead being shown an image of large-busted ‘glamour’ model was enough to put the idea on ice for a while.
Search iterations 1
More structure ideas
Concept phase
Promo treatment - version 2
We decided on five template designs for the new promo space. This gave us a lot more flexibility when cropping and composing promo images, and a much more involved relationship between the contents, with the copy sitting on top or within the image.

The position of the text box is either flush right, left, or just off centre, lining up within the grid design of the page. We also developed two horizontal or strip style variations.
Interplay of word and image

For the new promo design to work successfully there had to be a harmony or interplay between the image and text. The image had to be dynamic and visually interesting in order to entice the user. It needed to be a well thought through piece of high quality design. Often the promo copy will offer users two or three links to different areas. The picture to accompany this must be versatile enough to be relevant for all the links.

It was also important to remember the targeted group that each promo was aimed at. ‘Entertainment seekers’ (16-34) as a group are very visually aware. Consequently their media can be treated in a more dynamic way such as using vibrant colour schemes and unusual cropping.

‘Lifestylers’ on the other hand get the majority of ‘themed’ promos, and lifestyle subjects like gardening and food which lend themselves best to ‘abstract’ or ‘conceptual’ images.

Promos aimed at the last group, the ‘Default/First timers’ reach a very wide demographic of users. Promos must be a combination of the other two, with a main point of focus and be easily readable.
Promo iterations
‘Story over time’
iterations
Adding movement

Movement within the promo space was also a consideration. Although this raised technical issues, the idea and reason behind it was sound, especially when coupled with the idea of story over time. We then had the opportunity to introduce the notion of narrative.

In this example we see a shark, then the screen fades to black. The next couple of images are close silhouettes of the shark against the sea surface, again fading to black. Suddenly a rapid succession of biting images flash on screen, then jet black. The final image then ‘floats’ to the surface and the text appears. This treatment would best be put to use on large-scale pan-BBC projects like Walking with Dinosaurs.
More movement ideas

Dream Date
Who would you date if you spent the night in Buffy's hometown?

Scan the talent in the gallery. Don't let Buffy tie you to the TV. We're giving away vampish novels too.
Build phase
Final iterations
Usability results

Over 60 users participated in 10 user test sessions during May, September and October. All involved participation or observation by the members of homepage team. Changes were made iteratively throughout the process. Testing in the post-launch phase is to continue.

Aspects explored in sessions to date include:

- emotional response in the understand phase
- overall homepage look, feel and understanding in prototyping phases
- colour treatment, page structure and layout (over 15 variations used)
- promo treatment, understanding and effectiveness
- simple task performance, browse, search and navigation behaviour
- understanding and use of local postcode functionality
- new TV and Communicate homepage understanding
- introduction of an alphabetical index in the categories section
- card sorting of labelling in the categories section.

Results

- Throughout the process overall reactions were extremely positive.
- The A to Z list to browse categories was understood, used and appeared very effective.
- Colour treatment of pages adds soul and character, it provokes a emotive response.
- Much of the emotional impact is from the new promo image treatment.
- The implicit grid structure is effective, providing visual clarity to the information displayed.
- Presentation of categories as a two-column list provides for better navigation.
- User-centred organisation and labelling of categories has been suggested.
- New logo and visual branding is effective.
Categories

The categories area within the homepage is a vital area of real estate and an essential point of access for the user into a wealth of content.

Any discussions about a redesign or reshuffle of the categories area within the homepage always involve strong opinions and the balance between what is preferred by the user, what is politically desired by the individual ‘petals’ and what is ‘right’ for the business is always tricky.

The process of re-organisation was pretty systematic. Initial research into other possible models of classification (taxonomies) was carried out and several models of classifications and information seeking ‘tools’ were evaluated and tested to see if they would fit in with BBCi’s current content proposal. A purely taxonomic approach to the content was politically impossible at this stage of BBCi’s development so it was proposed that the best way forward was to organise and group the content based on the current content structure and more importantly the user’s preferred sorting. To this end a large card sorting exercise was organised and this was used as the basis of our category reorganisation. Shortcuts to the A-Z BBCi index were also added to help speed up the information-seeking process.

The final model is a delicately balanced trade-off between the purely taxonomical, the preferred user grouping and the politically important, current BBCi content creation structure. However, what this actually amounts to is a far more logical and easier user journey which helps the user considerably when seeking content.
Using colour
How the digital patina changes with use
The digital patina - full colour range

The promo image defines the colour for the whole page. As such it was necessary to create a swatch of colours which could cater for, and complement, every possible image that may be used.

The range covers the entire colour spectrum but each hue had to be individually adapted to the appropriate saturation and lightness to ensure subtlety and optimum contrast against text.

Each hue was then broken into 10 stages from the lightest to the most intense to provide the digital patina.
Build phase
Ancillary pages
Launch
The return of the voice map

One closing task of the project was to return to our voice mapping boards and re-evaluate our position on it. This was a difficult task and perhaps an impossible one to do objectively. However, we do feel that the position of the new homepage in the voice map is a fair and accurate one.

The new page has much more personality, the warmth and soul of the promo images is now extended through the entire page. The various patina colours enable the page to speak with one unified voice. As regards vertical movement, we’ve repositioned ourselves to be more accessible, local and user centred, resulting in a less highbrow position and widening our reach.
The team

Andrew Bowden – Client-side Developer
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Andy Harris – Client-side Developer
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Carol Patten – Homepage Designer
Caroline Smith – User Experience Designer
Christina Nsamba – Project Manager
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Tony Ageh – Head of Search, Listings and Core Web
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Victoria Conlan – Perl Developer
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