The adventures of Mortimer and his creative process

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Tackling a new project as a cross-discipline team has always meant an enriching experience. If the goal of the project is educational, then the result will double its interest. “Les aventures de Mortimer i la història del cinema d’animació” (The Adventures of Mortimer and the History of Animation) was the title of the project developed for the cultural centre Espai Rambleta, Valencia, to bring the history of animation to the general public, in an educative, fun way. This project is also one of the pieces developed within the course on Didactic Animation taught by David Heras, in the Master on Design and Illustration by the Universitat Politècnica de València (Polytechnic University of Valencia). It can be seen at http://larambleta.com/mortimer.

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The client initially asked for a piece of design or media that would allow to promote all the animation-related activities in the program of the cultural centre. It also had to be an educational tool to communicate the landmarks in the history of animation and its different influences. There were no initial restrictions with regards to format or approach. The product had to be educational, addressed to children and teenagers, while not appealing exclusively to these groups. The initial briefing was quite open and free of limitations.

The question we asked ourselves is, what can we contribute to make this project an interesting, original one? We decided to design a playful, interactive product. To that end, digital formats seemed to be the logical option, since the main segment of the target public is strongly influenced by digital technology.

Thus, we decided to develop an interactive game that would provide relevant information on animation cinema, while learning about its evolution throughout time. The game can be found in the client’s website. However, we considered that, even though many members of the audience attending the film projections at Rambleta are familiar with the animation cycles through its website, there are other members of the audience that hardly use its website. Thus we thought that printed media, distributed in the centre itself, could be a promotional tool for the game and the website. Thus, we had to work along those two lines: the digital media would be the main element, with the printed media as a complementary element.

The next challenge was to form a team sufficiently qualified to tackle such project. The cross-discipline team would have to manage all the elements of the work: graphic, documentation and technical. To that end, the team was comprised by Gonzalo Gironés, BA in Fine Arts, Marta Tortajada and Isabel Pérez, technical engineers specialising in Industrial Design and Rubén Ballesteros, IT engineer. Such diverse profiles have been key to the project since it allowed for very different perspectives. They are enriching and they imply that vast possibilities for the final media to be produced.
What would happen once the user matched two garments? We could not forget that the project had an educational function, so it had to provide relevant information on the history of animation. This is why we detected that the interaction had to continue somehow. We decided that once the user had dressed the character correctly, he would move onto a sort of background which would match the costume. Once in that setting, they would be presented with the relevant information to that time in history. To add interest to this section we had to hide such information behind some elements of the setting. It had to be the users who explored and discovered them, so the information would be completely integrated in the game dynamic.

The second main factor defining this project was its graphic character. This would be crucial for developing the character, costumes and the backgrounds. From a graphic point of view, it had to be appealing. The application had to attract the target audience, and in doing so, not only the design, but the graphic environment of the game was essential. We decided that the tone of the communication should be humorous. Seizing the character in all those different costumes should be sufficiently appealing for the user to be drawn to the challenge. This could only happen if we had the interest and curiosity of the user.

The third important factor in the development is content management and general documentation of the project. An extensive documentation and study process was carried out, which allowed us to decide what information to present. Firstly we try and establish the landmarks of animation. We divided the game in nine scenes from the beginning of animation in 1914 to-date. Then we synthesised the symbols that are characteristic of each historic landmark. From those, the costume corresponding to a character of that time was defined. Aside from such costume, the background and its interactive elements would be defined, along with the information contained in them. It is evident that study and documentation work were key at this point. The information provided had to be backed with rigour.

To sum it up, we could highlight three key factors in the study towards the application: the design of the interaction, the graphic aspect of the game and its contents. It was precisely here where the importance of the team being cross-discipline was clearly perceived. The many tasks to carry out were various and they pertained to different disciplines; each one of them was essential for the success or failure of the game development.

**Our main character**

The main character was clearly essential in the different media we used for this project. It is time to introduce him. The main character of this story is called Mortimer. Why the name? Studying the different landmarks of animation, it is impossible not to mention Walt Disney’s role. The most symbolic character of this production company is still Mickey Mouse, although not everybody knows that before Mickey Mouse there was another character,
precursor to the famous mouse, Mortimer. This way, we aimed at linking past and present through the name of Mortimer, winking at the origins of a timeless icon of animation history.

As stated before, Mortimer had to be appealing, fun-looking, to be liked by the user and earn their complicity. Therefore we chose a “cartoon” approach, not a realistic one. We modified the anatomical proportions of the character. We also had to lend a dynamic quality to the character, so every time it appeared it had to transmit such dynamism and avoid rigidity.

This approach was also extended to the different backgrounds where the character appears. Character and backgrounds had to be perfectly integrated, so a symbolic synthesis is necessary. Such synthesis would determine the key elements defining each of the historic landmarks that we wanted to present to the audience.

Finally, the project was developed and submitted to the client within the set deadlines. Our project presents clearly unique features as compared to the rest of projects submitted. Among them, would be its innovative approach which includes digital interaction, and the low production costs for the complete project. These we believe to be the main reasons that inclined our customer to hire us.

In conclusion, we would like to highlight the importance of a cross-discipline approach to this project, which we consider to be the key to its success. We believe that it has become essential to approach projects from many angles, thus coming up with innovative solutions. This can be done bringing together different disciplines and techniques for the same product, thus enriching it and offering a product that goes beyond the limits of each discipline, which allows to take the user by surprise.

Now that you know of Mortimer, you can play and take a journey through the history of animation.

Find him at http://larambleta.com/mortimer