

Helping Microsoft enhance the Xbox 360 gaming experience

Xbox 360, launched in late 2005, incorporates live online gaming with a new system for rating and matching gamers called TrueSkill. Feedback from gamer forums suggested some misunderstanding around the system affecting their experience of competitive gaming. Microsoft asked us to give them the understanding they needed to rethink the visualisation of TrueSkill on the Xbox platform and address gamers' misunderstandings.

Shadowing and in-context interviews

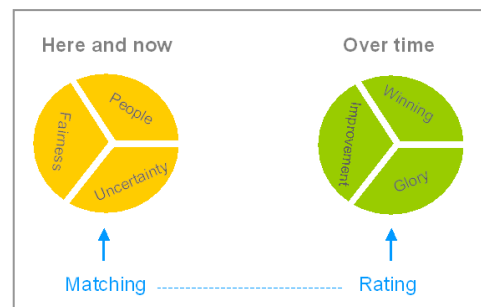


We conducted in-context research where we shadowed gamers playing competitively and captured from them stories that revealed the key components of the Xbox gaming experience. In particular we explored the factors that contributed to the best gaming experiences, the factors that motivated gamers to play 20 or more hours a week – and those that can diminish the experience. We also explored gamers' understanding and awareness of the TrueSkill system and how misunderstandings arise.

Modelling the Xbox experience

From our analysis of the data we were able to model the key inter-related components of the *here-and-now* and *over-time* Xbox experiences to see how matching and rating influence gamers' evaluation of these experiences. Good matching is fundamental to the creation of uncertainty and ratings can provide an objective measure of improvement – something more important to gamers than winning all the time.

We were also able to identify where the current representation of TrueSkill ratings was creating false understanding of how the system matches gamers.



Co-creation sessions to develop and evaluate UI concepts



These insights enabled us to make detailed recommendations to the Microsoft UI design team who then developed paper prototype screens to illustrate ways of visualising the principles behind the TrueSkill system and presenting the information in a clear and user-centred way. We conducted a series of co-creation sessions with groups of gamers to gain their expert feedback and input to the prototype screens. We could then

make recommendations for refinements to the new visualisation of TrueSkill on the Xbox 360 system that would support the optimum gaming experience.

What Microsoft had to say about the research and co-creation process

"new experience is sensitive in their research methods and gave us a deep understanding of how our users experience Xbox 360. They have helped us deconstruct the challenge of TrueSkill and given us the insights we need to enhance the gaming experience."

Professor Richard Harper, Senior Researcher, Microsoft Research, Cambridge