303.1 Major Research Project

Logbook: Designing Brand Identity in Three Free and Open Source Software Projects

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1 Introduction

In this logbook, I am describing my work with three different Free and Open Source Software [FOSS] projects. This type of software is created mostly through voluntary participation by people with common interests (Benkler 2002, p.378; Ye & Kishida 2003, p.10). Many projects creating FOSS are administered via the Internet and participants use online tools, such as forums and mailing lists, as their main communication channels (Wynants & Cornelis 2005, p.16). The software is distributed together with its production data, hence the term Open Source, and can be changed and reused by anybody (GNU 2006, [online]). This commonly happens under the agreement that the new outcome is distributed the same way (ibid.).

My intended contribution to each project is straight forward: I would like to participate as a graphics artist and design identity for their brand. The anticipated outcome is a set of visuals and guidelines with which the project can consistently identify and promote itself. As with most other members of FOSS projects, my work is voluntary (Benkler 2002, p.372). My challenge, while designing brand identity [BI], is to funnel a large amount of information about a brand into a simple and memorable design. A challenge the "Simplicity Program" of the MIT Media Laboratory describes as:

> *"The Simplicity Paradox refers to the fact that one always want a powerfully functional object which by nature of its very potential belies a complexity of operation. To make something simpler, often means to make something less powerful. How do you make something power-*

ful, but simple to operate at the same time? This is the challenge."
(MIT Media Laboratory 2004 [online])

My intentions are to learn, interact with interesting people from all around the world, and, above all, have fun. I will first give a detailed outline of my practical work for each project, before discussing challenges and solutions in the conclusions chapter.

2 Logbooks

22 August 2006

My research proposal has been discussed in detail and the practical component has been approved. The first thing I must do is find a project I can become a part of. In my preliminary online investigations, I found a demand for creative professionals in Open Source communities. I have viewed numerous FOSS project web sites and, from the data presented to me, many project participants appear to jump right into the coding work and worry later about building a community. A great place to start looking is the web site named *SourceForge*. Hosting over 127'000 projects, it is the major hub for FOSS development (SourceForge 2006, [online]). There is a "Help Wanted" section on the site with a separate category for projects seeking graphics designers. I initially contacted two projects from the list and, after briefly communicating with both project managers, chose to get involved in the one named *Sociopath*.

2.1 Logbook of the Sociopath Project

23 August 2006

The contributors of *Sociopath* are in the concept phase of creating a computer game that simulates life. The focus of the multi-player game is to simulate urban living, including themes like violence and crime. They compare *Sociopath* to two popular games and describe it as *Grand Theft Auto* meets *The Sims* (Rockstar Games 2006, [online]; Electronic Arts 2006, [online]). I contacted the project manager [PM] via the *SourceForge* site and briefly described who I am and what my services would be to the project.

24 August 2006

I received a reply from the PM of *Sociopath*. His name is Dale Greer and he requested that I send him some of my work as a reference (2006). I put together an overview of my most recent designs and sent them to him, I also added a link to my personal web site for additional information.

25 August 2006

We agreed upon the scope of my involvement and I became an official member of the *Sociopath* project.

26 August 2006

I first visited the project web site, but it does not have an introduction for new members. The main part of the site is the project's forum, where most of the communication takes place (Sociopath 2006).

4 June 2006

I went through the formalities of becoming a project member. This included creating my user accounts on the mailing list and forum and introducing myself to the community. I could started gathering information about the project and asked questions about the brand. While the forum already had well over 200 users, only five people were actively participating. Inside the forum, I started a new topic titled "Visual Identity". By interviewing the other members, I could pinpoint the positioning of the brand and gain inputs on what the visuals should look like.

17 June 2006

In the BI process, especially when applied to FOSS projects, it takes a while until the actual production can commence. Based on all the inputs, I started forming the ideas for the *Sociopath* mark in my head. I knew that the mark must be modern and appealing to a target audience consisting of computer game enthusiasts. Visual elements, like a lighting effect and a three-dimensional perspective, were whished as well as attributes similar to the Japanese manga-style.

Scribbles of the *Sociopath* brand identity
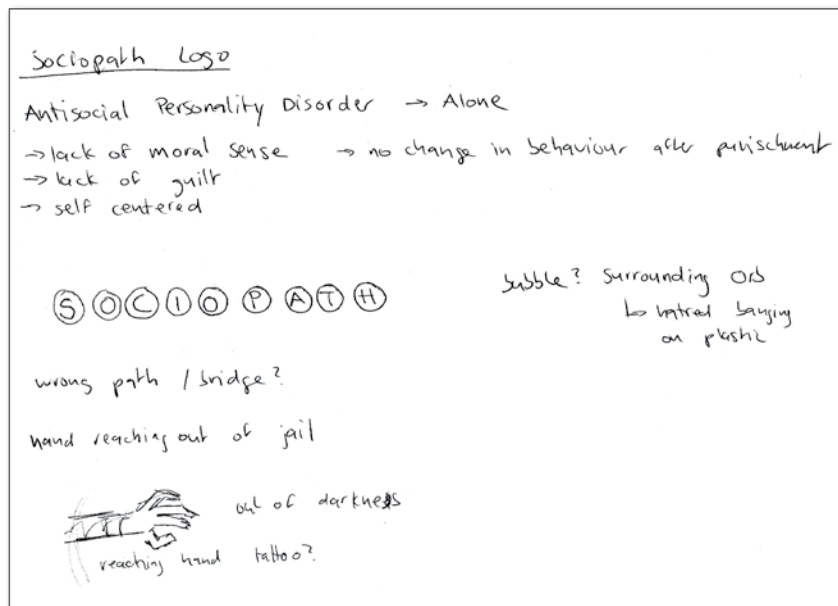
3 July 2006

Based on the inputs from community, I started creating variants of the mark. My first idea was to move each letter of the logotype apart and put them inside separate squares, as if the letters do not belong together, to visualize the term sociopath. I wanted to give these first versions a modern look, so I used a sans-serif font and made use of a reflection on the bottom of each letter. I also added a lighting effect to the top in order to enhance its depth.

Version one of the *Sociopath* mark

Version two of the *Sociopath* mark

12 June 2006

For my next mark variant, I made use of one of the project members recommendations to use a Japanese comic style. I sought to draw a face in the manga-style that would display the feeling of angst, loneliness, and unhappiness. I made the head quite round and the eyes look to the right, as if something or someone would be behind the character. I also shaped the

mouth as a frown. On the bottom I placed the logotype with the brand name. In this version, unlike the previous two, I took a more sleek approach and did not add many visual effects like lighting or shadows. I also found that a 3D-effect and the flat comic style did not fit well together. To then add some color, I chose green, because it's the color of life. I then included dark grey into the mix in order to add a depressing emotion to the visual.

Version three of the Sociopath mark

17 June 2006

I posted the variants on the project forums and received feedback within hours. Overall, the manga-style mark was preferred. I did get some criticism for it, however, that the facial expression does not fit the meaning of the word sociopath. After a debate on the character's expression, we decided not to change it.

6 July 2006

In the next round of the *Sociopath* visual identity, I enhanced the mark and started searching for appropriate fonts. I eventually decided to create two new variants with different font styles to find out how the community liked them. The first font was created by an Open Source project and is titled "Libertine". The second font is a free font titled "Enigma". The Libertine variant was chosen by the majority of the project developers and the community agreed upon the new Sociopath mark. It took much communication on my behalf to find out what the project was looking for, but, based on the feedback I got from the project members, I think this first element of the visual identity conveys the brand well.

The final version of the *Sociopath* mark.

13 August 2006

I moved on to enhance the verbal identity of the project. The brand name was chosen at the start of the project and I had no influence in its creation. The PM had also made a descriptor for the game which I found fitting: "The game of social experiments." The only new thing I could add to the verbal identity was a tagline. After some brainstorming, I decided to post my first

suggestion of the tagline in the forums : "Disturbingly urban." Opinions went both ways, so I sought to find a new tagline that would win over the entire community.

17 August 2006

A project member gave me some good inputs on the verbal identity and I started playing around with the word "pathos". For a tagline however, the word was too complicated, since it should be simple and memorable. Online investigations on the word lead me to create a new variant: "Live your lower self". The new tagline fits the brand strategy, describes a core benefit of the game, and all the community members welcomed it.

19 August 2006

Now that the main components of the BI were complete, I created an HTML document with the guidelines. It contains a summary of my contributions and defines rules how the BI should be implemented in the future. I also saved the mark as a SVG file, an open format based on XML, so that it can be modified by project members when the need arises. My final work was then submitted to the PM by e-mail.

1 September 2006

I found a photographer on the photo sharing web site *Flickr*. Her name is Vivian Tan and she has a style that fits the *Sociopath* BI perfectly. I contacted her and asked if she would be interested in making some photos for the game. She agreed, and after a couple of weeks I got some demo shots. Using one of her photos, I designed a concept for online advertising:

Live your lower self.

SOCIOPATH

The game of social experiments. Coming soon to a browser near you at neurosisstudios.com

An exemplary application of the *Sociopath* BI, based on a photo from Vivian Tan.

2.2 Logbook of the OpenEats Project

17 June 2006

I contacted the *OpenEats* project the same way as *Sociopath*. The PM posted their need for a mark in the "Help Wanted" section of the *SourceForge* web site. This time around, I only contacted one project, because I new the probability is high that my offer would be accepted. I sent examples of my work to the PM, including the new *Sociopath* mark. We agreed on the range of my work and I joined the project.

25 June 2006

The PM, Quenten Griffith, added me to the projects forums and mailing list and, upon introducing myself in the forums, I got right to work. First I needed to do some investigations about the project. *OpenEats* is software powering a web site where people can share cooking tips and recipes. The code is advancing from its alpha stage and four developers are currently active in the project. Unlike *Sociopath*, a full project web site is already running, including developer guidelines and project goals (OpenEats 2006, [online]). This helped me learn the attributes of the *OpenEats* brand.

4 July 2006

I read all the information provided on the web site and started asking questions in the forum. My first question was meant to capture the perception of the brand from the project members: "If OpenEats were a person, what would its character be?" Answers were: warm, social, active, hands-on, gastronome, and inviting. The PM had some wishes on the design:

> *"I want the look to be easy for anyone to understand and does not need to be all cookie cutter Web 2.0 look that everyone is going for now a days. Simple, clean, easy."* (Griffith 2006)

The information concerning the 'Web 2.0' style means that the plastic look and reflections, like the first variant of the *Sociopath* mark, should be avoided.

8 July 2006

I was brainstorming for days on topics related to cooking and created many scribbles. Cooking is a hard topic, since many designs have been done before in this area. Many of my ideas already seemed taken.

Scribbles of the *OpenEats* brand identity
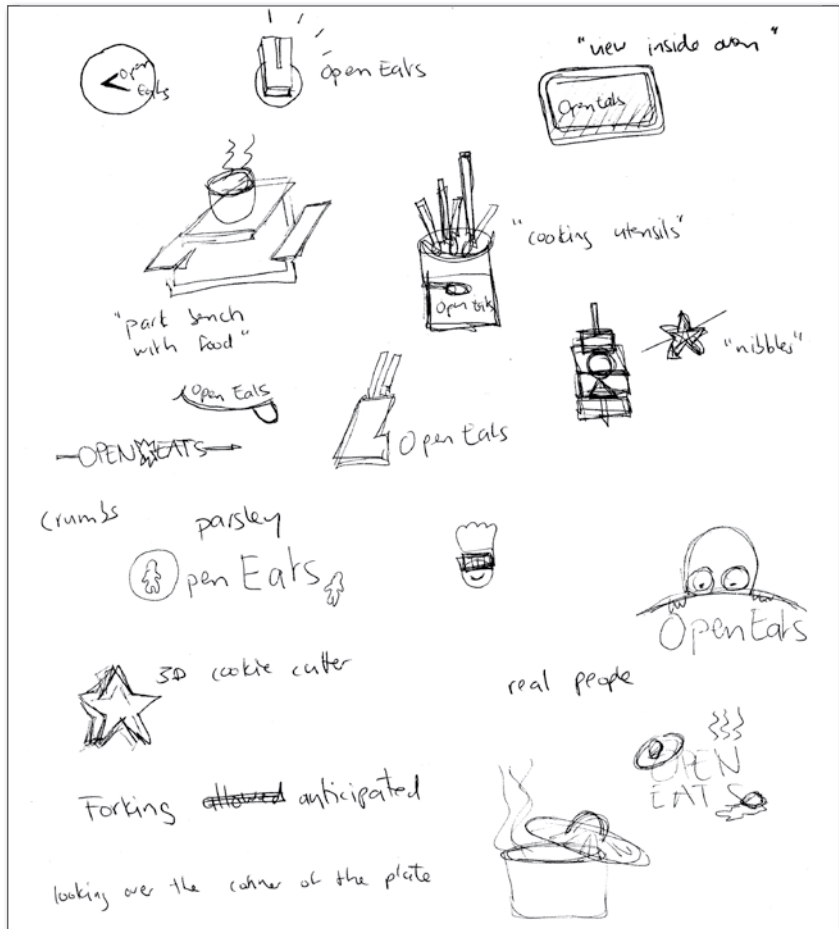
12 July 2006

After four days of designing, I had three presentable variants. The idea behind the first mark is to 'just add parsley'. To me, parsley is the finishing touch to many cooked meals and usually shows that much effort went into its creation.

The first version of the *OpenEats* mark.

In the second one, I tried to present *OpenEats* as a valuable cooking tool. I, therefore, drew a pot with typical cooking utensils and added the logotype as if it were sticking out as well.

The second version of the *OpenEats* mark.
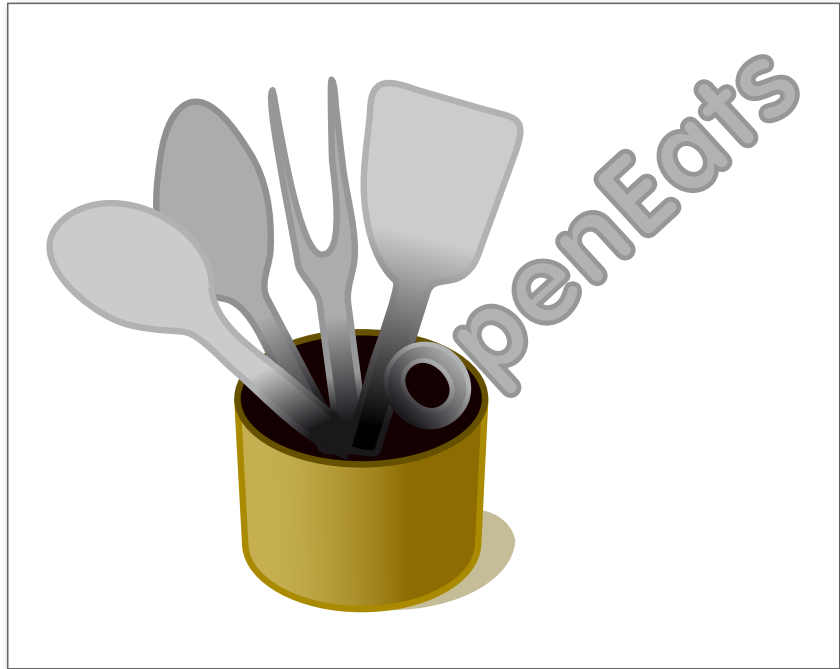
I did not use an object as the mark in the third variant, but visualized the meaning of the words using each first letter. To visualize "open" I took out a chunk of the "o" and filled it with the rest of the word. Next I also made the lowercase "e" look like it is eating the rest of the letters.

The third version of the *OpenEats* mark.
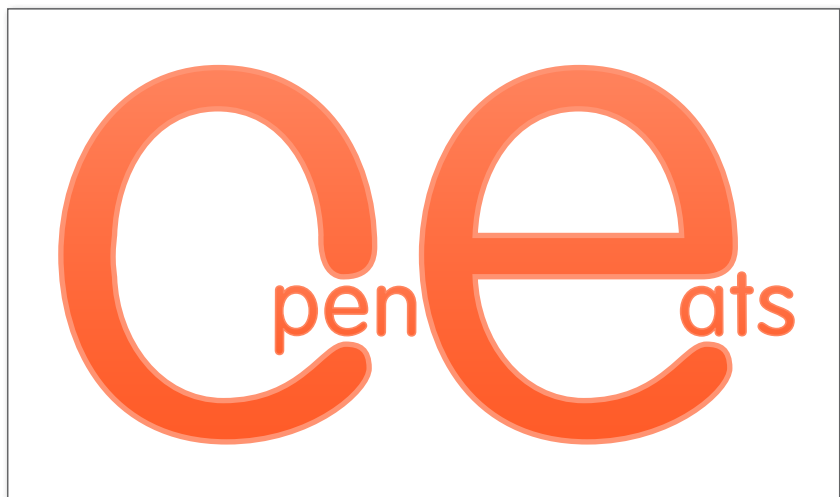
I proposed a new tagline at the same time I submitted the marks: "Forking anticipated." The meaning of the tagline goes two ways. By anticipating forking, OpenEats positions itself as a stage previous to eating. Forking also has another meaning in Open Source terminology. When a project is forked, its source code is taken and re-used, so that two similar projects can be developed interdependently. By anticipating forking, the project makes a statement that the code is of such good quality that other projects will wish to use it.

23 July 2006

The community chose the parsley variant. In a second round, I changed the shape of the mark and reduced the number of colors in an effort to simplify it. I also shortened the decender of the letter "p" to give the logotype more balance.

Tony Spaeth, a well known identity consultant, wrote in his eleventh annual report on noteworthy corporate identity programs:

> *Simplicity is a cardinal rule in mark design: There shall only be one graphic device, one gimmick, one dingbat.* (Spaeth 2001, p.50)

While I do tend to design complex visuals with my initial mark designs, I try and simplify them in the second round. I did leave a slight lighting effect in the logotype, to give it some texture if viewed in a large size.

The final version of the *OpenEats* mark.

25 June 2006

With the basic elements of the BI in place, it was time to create additional brand touchpoints. I recommended creating some promotional material to be used on the web site as an introduction. To enhance the warm and welcoming identity of *OpenEats*, I recommended photos of people cooking together. A project member, who is a photographer, volunteered for taking the shots. The user interface for administering the recipes also needed to be created in the visual style defined by the mark. I agreed to create these buttons, since I was best suited for the task.

Buttons for the *OpenEats* user interface.

The *OpenEats* guidelines were created and submitted to the site administrator to be included with the other project guidelines.

A screen shot showing part of the *OpenEats* brand identity guidelines

2.3 Logbook of the Jajuk Project

23 July 2006 I took a different approach for searching FOSS projects this time. Instead of looking for projects that know they need design expertise, I chose to target software that is directly of use to me. I browsed the projects listed on *SourceForge* and found three that I would like to join. Upon communicating with the three project leaders, Bertrand Florat of the Jajuk project replied:

> *Thanks for your proposition. Indeed, most of the Jajuk artwork was done by myself and I'm far from being skilled in this area. It would be great if you could enhance Jajuk's visual appearance.* (Florat 2006)

The other two projects also replied, but we could not reach an agreement on the scope of my involvement.

31 July 2006 *Jajuk* is software for maintaining a music library. Since the software is developed in the *Java* programming language, it is available for many different computer platforms. As of this day, the project has six active develop-

ers and 21 contributors (Jajuk 2006, [online]). I registered to the mailing lists, since they are the main communication channel. Unlike *Sociopath* and *OpenEats*, *Jajuk* does not use forums as the primary method for users to interact.
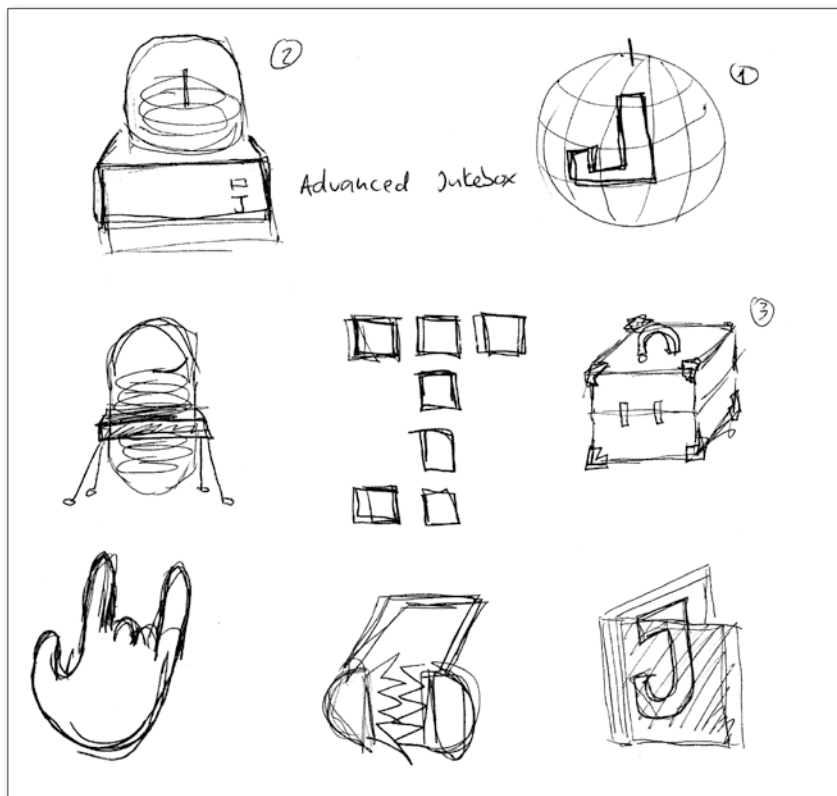
8 August 2006

I started gathering data on the *Jajuk* brand. The project web site is informative and gives good insight. I started asking questions on the developer's mailing list and soon had the core attributes of the brand in writing.

12 August 2006

Now that I knew what the brand is about, I started scribbling my ideas on paper on how to visualize them.

Scribbles of the *Jajuk* brand identity

17 August 2006

After creating multiple different variants of the *Jajuk* mark, I submitted the three I thought to be best. My first variant was a CD case, in which I chose to visualize *Jajuk* as an alternative music storage medium to compact discs. 'Missing discs' could be the basis for a range of visuals and advertisements.

The first version of the *Jajuk* mark

Since the software is regarded to be modern and contain much functionality, I chose to visualize these aspects be creating an icon that looks like a new-age equalizer. I then used the blocks to form the letter J.

The second version of the *Jajuk* mark
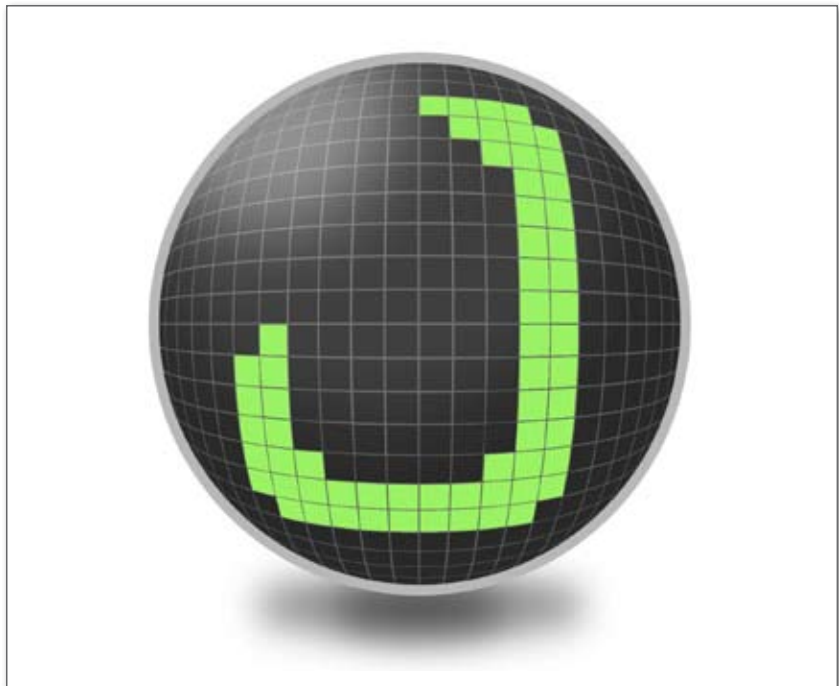
I created a type of jukebox machine with buttons on the front looking like a face, making it almost like a mascot. Since the basis of the visual was created using 3D software, it would be possible to show the machine in multiple different perspectives.

The third version of the *Jajuk* mark
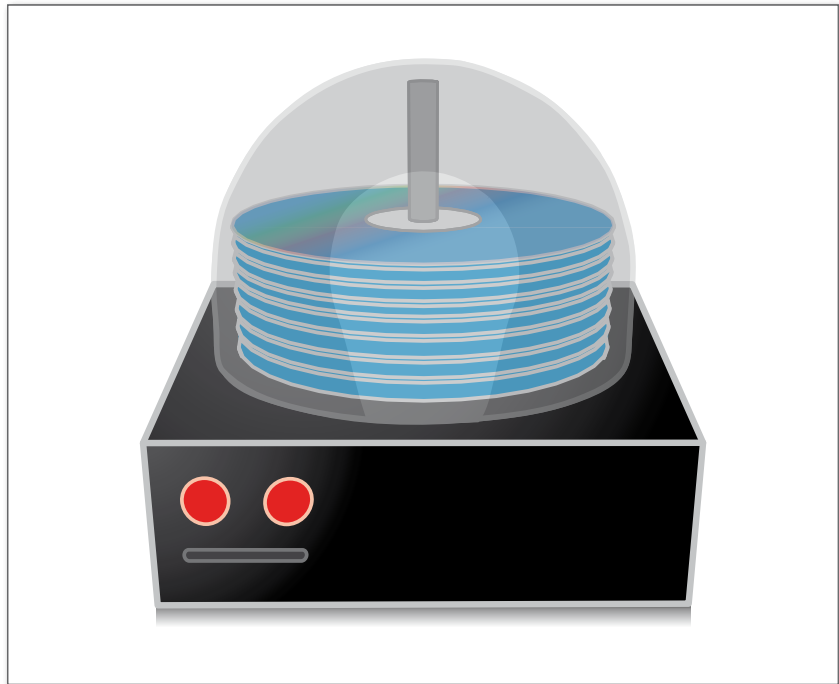
I received much feedback, and the first two versions were liked the most. A vote was called via the mailing list, lasting for a week, so that all the project members could participate.

20 August 2006

I discussed the verbal identity with the PM via the mailing list. At the start of the project, the brand name was formed by combining the words 'Just another Jukebox'. This phrase was also the tagline and was still displayed within the software. A new tagline was placed on the web site as the project grew, describing *Jajuk* as an: 'Advanced Jukebox'. I recommended to drop the first tagline, since the functionality of the software had outgrew the phrase 'just another'. I thought the newer tagline described the brand well and had no reason for changing it.

28 August 2006

The vote on the *Jajuk* variants ended today. The equalizer version won by just five points, with a final score of 150, compared to the 145 points given to the CD case version. I therefore continued my work on the basis of the equalizer concept. I decided to loose the 'J' and instead use a form of an equalizer. A second vote on the mailing list showed that the community also preferred the new version.
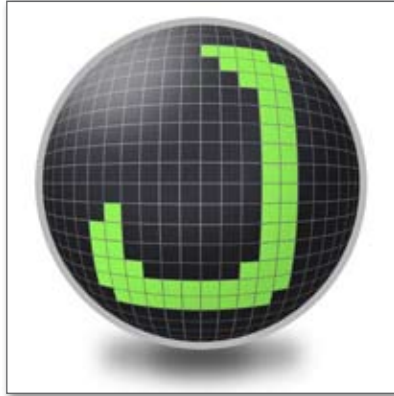
Round two of the *Jajuk* mark, based on the favored equalizer style.
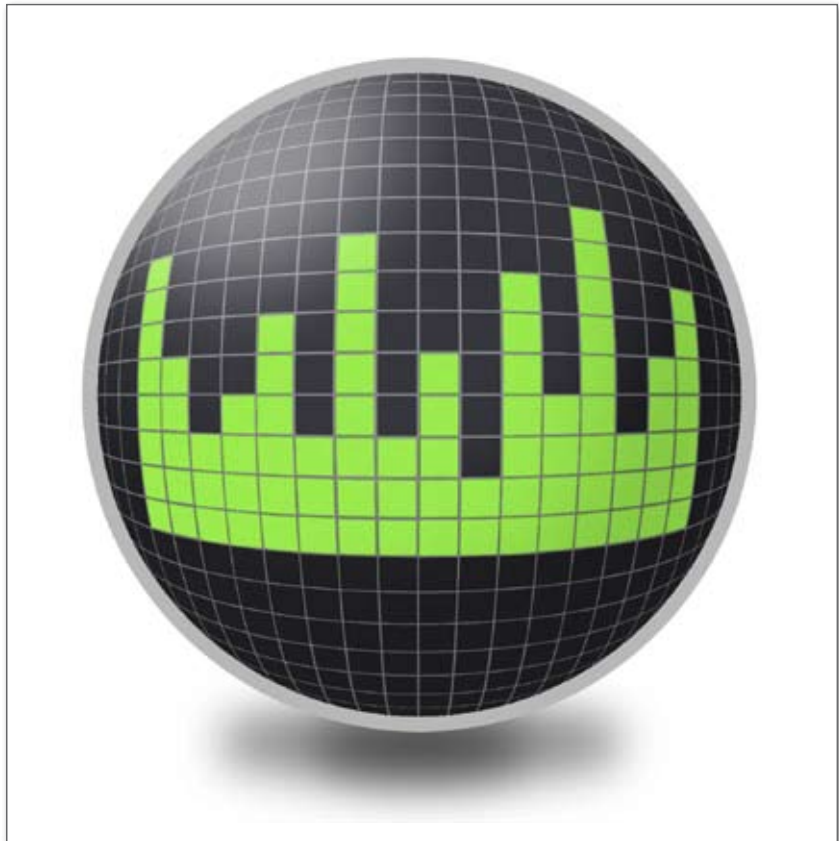
The final *Jajuk* mark.

31 August 2006

With the mark in its final form, I started creating further touchpoints. Foremost, the software needed a new splash screen. I designed two types, based on the equalizer look that was liked by the majority of the community. I then submitted them to the mailing-list and awaited feedback.

Version one of the
Jajuk Splashscreen

Version two of the
Jajuk Splashscreen

1 September 2006

All the comments were in favor of the second splash screen and so I sent the final image to the PM so he could build it into the next release of the software. Next I started creating the icons. I used the mark as a basis and optimized the images to be viewed in small sizes.

The *Jajuk* icon in comparison to others.

2 September 2006

With the main two touchpoints finished, I wrote the BI guidelines and committed the document to the project.

3 Conclusions

3.1 Production Time

Both the *Sociopath* and the *OpenEats* projects were finished by the end of July 2006. *Jajuk* was finalized by the end of August. The direct production time was not consistently recorded, since tasks, such as discussions, were done on almost a daily basis. The best part of the work, the actual designing, was shorter than originally presumed. Extensive time went into joining the project, learning the brand attributes, and interacting with other community members.

3.2 Equipment Used

All the equipment was personally owned. I did all the work on my *Apple Powerbook* and used the software applications *Adobe Creative Suite CS2* and *Cinema 4D* for production.

In the following three sections, I will recapitulate the challenges and solutions for each of the three FOSS projects.

3.3 The Sociopath Project

Challenge   The project was conceptualizing a life simulation game. *Sociopath* must emote a sinister identity but should also look modern.

Solution   A mark in a Japanese manga-style was created with a face expressing sorrow. The tagline "Live your lower self" is added to enhance the brand name and describe the game-play.

3.4 The OpenEats Project

Challenge   *OpenEats* seeks to power a dynamic web site for people to manage and share cooking recipes. The identity must express warmth and be inviting to a broad target audience. The style should appear simple in contrast to the complexity of the software.

Solution   A colorful wordmark was created and "parsley" was added as a sleek pictorial enhancement. The tagline "Forking anticipated" expresses the message of the *OpenEats* brand, both for project members and web site visitors.

3.5 *The Jajuk Project*

Challenge   Jajuk is feature rich software that organizes libraries of music. The BI must have a technical style and appeal to music lovers.

Solution   An icon was designed in the style of an equalizer and the brand attributes are expressed in the tagline "Advanced Jukebox".

3.6 *Final Thoughts*

The goals I set in the introduction to this logbook were to learn, interact, and have fun. I will now reflect on each point:

Learning

The main goal was to learn how the work of designing BI can be applied to a FOSS project, in conjunction with my research. Learning practical skills was secondary, but not less useful. Since I knew the outcome of my work will be used and viewed by many other people, there was reason to do the best I could. This helped me press the boundaries of my own creativity. That, in the end, lead to an increase in design knowledge. Since I have learned to use and apply a production model, my approach to a new creative project is fundamentally different than just a few months ago.

Interacting

What I found interesting about working in an Open Source project, is the way people interact with each other. All the communication happens online, and therefore the details of 'face to face' communication are lost. I have been in constant communication with the projects for the last five months, but I do not personally know any of these people. I don't know how they look like, where they are working from or even what language they would usually speak. What it comes down to, in such a project, is that only their thoughts and contributions count. It is interesting to know, that I have collaborated with people scattered all around the globe to create my designs.

Having Fun

The fun factor was the driving factor. It encompassed both learning and interacting, and was the positive emotion I got in return for my efforts. As Linus Torvalds, creator of *Linux*, ounce said: *"The most important design issue is the fact that Linux is supposed to be fun."* (Torvalds 1994)

I experienced allot of fun within the *Sociopath, OpenEats,* and *Jajuk* projects and look forward to future collaboration.

4 *Glossary*

Anime The term is derived from the word animation, but specifically refers to animations from Japan. The Japanese animations have there own distinct styles, such as oversized eyes.

Decender The elements of a font below the base line. For instance in the lowercase letters: p, j and y.

Logotype The part of a signature that shows the name of the brand. (Wheeler 2006, p.108)

Manga A Japanese comic style.

Mark A mark is a visual expression of a brand and is synonymic with the words: Brandmark, Trademark, Symbol, Avatar, Icon, and Logo. (Wheeler 2006, p.53)

Portable Network Graphics [PNG] A file format for storing images that is compatible with web browsers.

Small caps A font variant in which the letters are all capitalized but do not take the full height of the font. For instance: THIS IS A TEXT IN SMALL CAPS

SourceForge A web site that provides management tools to FOSS projects (SourceForge 2006, [online]).

Tagline Similar to a slogan, a tagline is a memorable phrase that sums up the tone and premise of a brand. Taglines are usually used for entertainment products, such as movies, games and web sites. The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School defines it as *"a statement or motto that succinctly defines or represents an organization's mission". (JHP 2006, [online])*

Verbal & Visual Identity The visual and verbal elements of BI.

Wordmark *"A freestanding acronym, company name, or product name that has been designed to convey a brand attribute or positioning."* (Wheeler 2006, p.52)

Extensible Markup Language [XML] A file format for structuring data.

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