

Pogo Chat

Rochelle Edwards
Electronic Arts Inc., USA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pogo.com, an Electronic Arts (EA) casual gaming website, has over 150 games. The older, timeless games, around 610 horizontal pixels, are neighbored by an online group chat window which allows players to communicate during gameplay. Newer games do not have the same size constraints, some as wide as 760 horizontal pixels. These newer games originally lacked a chat window; however, the feedback from Pogo users was clear – they wanted the ability to chat. This paper will focus on the iterative usability testing utilized in determining if and how chat should be added into these new games on Pogo. The chat solutions as well as some challenges faced in reaching these solutions are discussed. While players wanted a chat window in all games, they did not want it to interfere with their game play. There was a preference for multiple chat solutions depending on the size of the game brick.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Pogo.com, EA's casual gaming website, has been a steady place for players to play casual games including card games, word games, puzzle games, and more for over 12 years. Pogo, which was originally called the Total Entertainment Network (TEN), was acquired by EA in February 2001. The average player tends to be female and above the age of 35. Individuals who play at Pogo.com can play as a guest (where there is no barrier to entry), as a free player (where users sign up to create a user-

name which allows them to save their scores and more), or as a Club Pogo player (where a monthly or annual fee is paid, giving Club players access to added features and games). Free players and Club players have access to an online group chat window which is pinned to the right side of the vast majority of games (see Figure 1). For all games on Pogo, players manually select a chat room (or have the system choose one automatically to start a game faster). These chat rooms accommodate up to 60 players, and each chat room has its own group chat. Chatting takes place more commonly in slower-paced games such as *Pogo Bowl* or *Hog Heaven Slots*, where players may socialize while playing to enhance the gaming experience. In all games, players can chat during timed games by pausing them if they have been focusing on gameplay...or if their focus is more on socialization than game score or completion, players can always chat and let the timer run out. Players can also chat before games begin, once games end, and during intermissions (the latter being found for the free audience). In multiplayer games like *Spades*, *Canasta*, and *Dominoes*, the chat room is limited to the players at the table, and a player can then communicate with other teammates and/or opponents as well as individuals who are watching the game. The chat window also works to relay pertinent information, such as recent prize winners and achievement progress. In regard to the latter, Club Pogo players partake in daily and weekly challenges. For example, a weekly challenge may involve matching all four seasons in 10 games on *Mahjong Garden*. Players are able to see how far along they are in finishing a challenge by looking at the chat window – after a successful game, the window will reflect the progress (i.e. “All four seasons matched 3 of 7 times”).

SETTING THE STAGE

Games without Chat

In order to appease current players and to pique the interest of new players, Pogo looks to bring fresh new games to its website. While there are some long-lived favorites that do not grow stale, players (including the loyal audience who has been with Pogo since its inception as well as a newer audience) seek novelty among the games. Some of these games are first featured on Facebook, and due to their popularity, are then brought over to Pogo.com. Pogo Games, a Facebook application, was introduced in 2010. It contains over 25 games, such as *SCRABBLE*, *Poppit!*, *BATTLESHIP*, *Pogo Bowl*, *MONOPOLY*, and *Rainy Day Spider Solitaire*. Many of the Pogo Games, such as the aforementioned titles, are already available on Pogo.

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