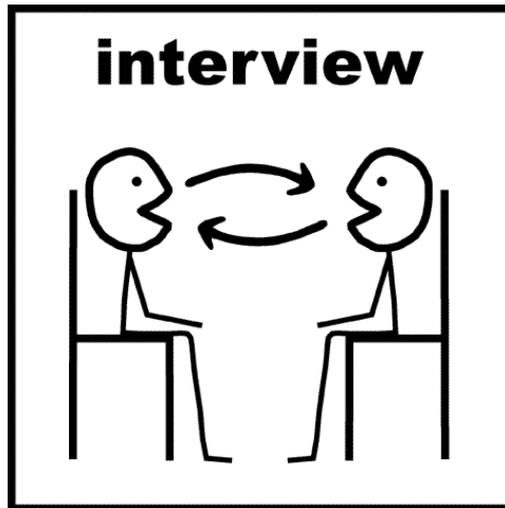


BEHIND THE PIXELS

ISSUE 4





An Interview with Juho “Optimus” Paasonen (by Mark)

Juho joined the Sulake team last year, and since then he’s been working as a UX design lead / creative director for the Habbo team. You can read the interview below and follow Juho on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/#!/ediotti>.

Just don’t ask him about the ending to Mass Effect 3.

Mark: How did you come to work in Sulake?

Juho: Around half a year ago I had just finished my contract as an interim Design Director for an American start-up, when I was contacted by someone at Sulake, asking if I happened to know a good candidate for a user experience lead role. Her timing was perfect, so I told her I knew an excellent one, and here I am! ;D

Mark: What's your role in Sulake?

Juho: I'm the Creative Director of UX design, so the short answer is that I'm responsible for the overall user experience of the Habbo products. A slightly longer one is that I draw reference designs and guidelines that form the foundation of the usability and visual appearance of our interfaces, both for the client and the web.

A big part of my work is also setting general design direction for new/refreshed features, so that everything in Habbo works in a consistent manner, regardless of which one of our talented designers happens to be working on it.

I also work closely with our esteemed wordsmith Mark in defining a cool and

consistent tone of voice for any texts in our interfaces, like Furni descriptions, help texts, etc.

Mark: What skills do you need to be a (UX) Creative Director?

Juho: I've always said that the greatest trait of a UX designer, be him/her starting his/her career or working on creative direction, is common sense. IMHO, only around 40% of good user experience is knowing the best practices for usability or being on top of the current design trends. The 60% chunk is really about applying your experience, common sense (and caffeine buzz ;D) to the design at hand.

A good Creative Director also genuinely cares about the other designers; he/she ensures that everyone can work on things that develop their professional skills, and gives constant feedback on their work (even though he/she wouldn't be their direct manager). A GREAT Creative Director admits that he/she doesn't necessarily have all the answers, and learns from the entire design community.

Mark: What concerns do you take into account when designing a new feature?

Juho: Whenever I work on a task, big or small, I always want to have answers to three basic questions:

- 1.) Who are we designing for?
- 2.) What is the complete journey...
- 3.) ...and how to make it as effortless and appealing as possible?

With these questions in mind, we gather together to drink massive quantities of coffee and energy drinks, manically draw on whiteboards, paper pads and pixels, and at eventually end up with a complete design draft that's ready for you guys to try out. :)

Mark: How do you ensure that your designs are as easy and appealing as possible?

Juho: We have a three-step design testing process. First, we do sanity checks on design drafts by using our Sulake colleagues as human guinea pigs. They're brutally honest, so if you manage to get even a "meh." instead of "you need to check your medication", you're all set for the second round.

The second round is a so-called concept acceptance evaluation, in which we have chunks of a design, or an unpolished journey, that we want to sanity

check with you guys. A good example of this would be me posting drafts for Illumina, and asking your opinions and ideas on how they could be improved.

The last round is a usability test, that can be done in a lot of ways. One of the more useful methods is having a working prototype or a beta, and asking the users to go through a set of test tasks. We then analyze the results and make improvements.

Mark: What's the most exciting/ fun thing about your work?

Juho: Definitely getting the sudden spark of inspiration, and seeing your idea come to life and improving through open discussion and feedback from the users.

Mark: What are you currently working on?

Juho: My main task right now is leading the design work of Illumina, our new UI style. You've already seen some early drafts of it, and we'll continue to keep you guys in the loop as the work matures. Stay tuned in Twitter.

Mark: Finally, what's your favourite Huey Lewis And The News song?

Juho: Hip to be square.