

/gallery

Christian Hall reveals this month's hottest new websites

1-10 Beyond Apollo

URL www.beyondapollo.com

Company Version Industries

URL www.versionindustries.com

The teaser site can take a variety of forms, but when the designer is working on something that isn't even in production, things take a more difficult and unexpected turn. Pre-production may have begun on the film adaptation of Barry N Malzberg's *Beyond Apollo*, but Version Industries had little to go on to create this amazingly atmospheric and chaotic 'pre-vision' of the film to come.

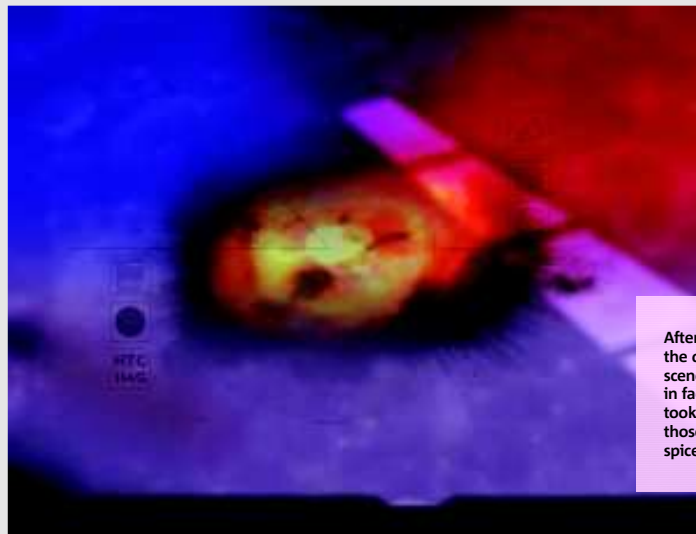
Director Michael Grodner told the designers that he had an incredible project that was gaining critical mass and that now was the time to start publicising it to attract investors, promoters and, of course, the fans of the novel on which it's based. "You just know that at some point, if it's made well enough, it will end up in front of the right set of eyes," says Version's president Caspar Newbolt. "The eyes of someone with the imagination to see the film's incredible potential and give it that little bit of a push to make sure it happens."

Grodner came to Version Industries with the script and some footage NASA had given him, and asked the designers what they thought they could do with it. "We wanted to capture the nature of the script, nothing too literal, just things that make you feel close to what certain parts made us feel," says Newbolt. Indeed, it's the ability of this site to instil a sense of intrigue that makes it a success. There's also the necessary element of suspense and terror created by the interrupted transmission. "We wondered what it might be like if you were trying to watch the movie but it kept going static or glitching and you only got fragments of the full piece, but enough to give you a faint picture of what it's about – a sense of tension, interesting dialogue and an overall beautiful mystique."

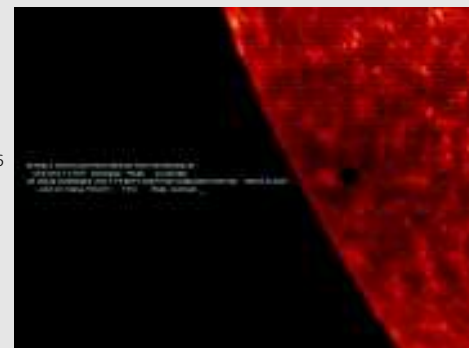
"We wondered what it might be like if you only got fragments of the full piece"

Caspar Newbolt

Version Industries had the finished script, so they set about recording the more poignant lines of dialogue and a series of soundscapes that they could use in conjunction with the old space footage from NASA.



After the first prototype was built the director pulled two of the scenes from the site as they were, in fact, too specific. Version then took some of the elements from those scenes and used them to spice up the remaining two.





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1-5 Oval Design

URL www.ovaldesign.com.hk

Company Pill & Pillow & CoDesign

URL www.pillandpillow.com & www.codesign.com.hk

Pill & Pillow and CoDesign were tasked with creating a marketing brochure and website for creative agency Oval. The theme harks back to the original arcade space shooters, and the whole site has a retro galactic feel to it. Not only does it look great visually, but it plays great too. We say 'play', because the site feels like a game. You navigate the site by flying a spaceship between planets, which act as the content areas. While this has some merit in entertainment, it's also highly effective, forcing users to use the arrow keys for a more tangible experience, as you get a sense of speed and weight rather than just direction. The black-and-white colour scheme used is also representative of classic space video games.



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6-10 Waterlife – The Great Lakes

URL waterlife.nfb.ca

Company Jam3 & Glossy

URL jam3media.com & www.glossyinc.com

Waterlife is an online experience about the distress of the Great Lakes, following on from a film by the National Film Board of Canada. The lakes affect the water that 35million people drink every day. The site morphs the visual content into recognisable structures representing the lakes' plight, such as litter and chemicals. It's created in Papervision3D with Flash and ActionScript. "Technically this project pushed the limits of Flash. We were constantly trying to make things cooler, less processor-intensive and more intuitive," says technical director Mark McQuillan. "Our goal was to translate the film into a high level interactive experience," adds creative director Pablo Vio.



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"This pushed the limits of Flash. We were trying to make things more intuitive"

Mark McQuillan



1-5 I Am Always Hungry

URL www.iamalwayshungry.com/VERS7
 Company In house
 URL In house

I Am Always Hungry is the studio of art director and interactive designer Nessim Higson. His freshly relaunched website is a clean affair with click-and-drag navigation. “As the web has matured the excitement and experimentation seems to have diminished, and has been replaced with usability standards and commerce – this site is a reaction to standardisation,” he says. The click-and-drag idea is complemented by a scrolling menu that appears as you hover over its label, and disappears when you move your mouse away. The interface design makes this a highly intuitive website to use. “It’s meant to challenge the concept of space. It will undoubtedly frustrate some, but may contribute to a large laugh and smile for others.”



6-10 After The Impact

URL www.aftertheimpact.com
 Company COG1
 URL cog1.com

This promotional site for Rage, an FPS and racing game set to launch on consoles in 2010, isn’t quite what you might expect because it doesn’t revel in the game’s incredible 3D effects, instead opting for a mostly 2D experience. The brief from the client, id Software, was to give a small, mysterious glimpse into the world that will be Rage. “Part motion comic, part interactive 3D environment, visitors follow the story of a lone survivor after a comet crashes to Earth,” says creative director Jeffrey Hyman. “The camera moves through a 3D space of 2D layers, creating a pleasing parallax effect as the user navigates around ultra-high-resolution images.” COG1 used Flash 10, Papervision3D and Pixel Bender to build the site.

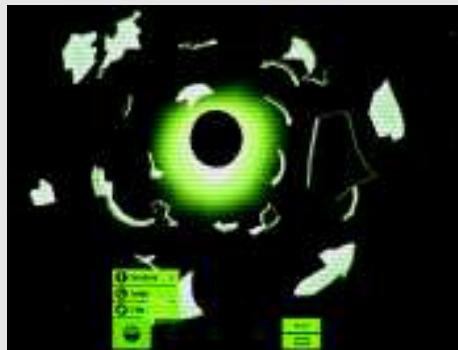


“It will frustrate some, but may contribute to a laugh and smile for others”

Nessim Higson



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1-6 EnergyLab

URL www.energylab.tv

Company Grupo W & Hello Enjoy

URL www.grupow.com & www.helloenjoy.com

EnergyLab is the home of a powerful energy drink, and what better way to show just how mighty it is than to blow it apart like a nuclear explosion? “The brief was basically about the product energy, and how it should be seen in the market. With this in mind, and trying to do something really interactive and entertaining for the user, we came up with this idea of doing the 3D puzzle,” says producer Rodrigo Calderon. Keeping with the nuclear theme, the pop-up menus feel electrified, and Grupo W researched interferences in video transmissions to get the feeling right. “This was created in After Effects, manipulating each frame separately with a wave deformation effect, then we exported it as PNGs, imported it in Flash and added effects.”



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7-11 Assassin's Creed: Twitter

URL www.assassinscreed.com/twitter

Company RED Interactive Studio

URL www.ff000.com

Twitter's popularity continues apace and has spawned hundreds of useful apps, but few have opted to make it the core of a website – especially for a heavyweight client. This site for Ubisoft's Assassin's Creed II enables visitors to compete in a real-time social battle using Twitter. Users assassinate targets with a tweet. With only minutes to launch a successful attack or counter, timing is everything, and the Twitter element gives this experience an immediacy that's rarely seen on a website. By sending and responding to tweets, the user is drawn into the world of the Assassin's Creed game and a point ranking system opens up new weapons. It's a simple concept that's brilliantly thrust onto the social platform everyone's using.



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“The brief was about the product energy, and we came up with this 3D puzzle”

Rodrigo Calderon

.net/showcase/gallery



1-6 theGOOD

URL www.thegood.com

Company In house

URL In house

Interactive designers theGOOD have a great portfolio website, which is a lesson in how to manipulate data in cool visual ways. The backdrop for the whole experience is a canvas-like material and the content appears as moving transparent bubbles. This is what instantly sets this page apart from others, because any idea of a traditional menu system has been removed and the visitor's attention is now on whichever bubble takes their fancy at the time – revealing the content when clicked on. The trick is that each bubble is only a label when the mouse cursor pauses over it, which encourages the user to move around, sampling each bubble before clicking through. To aid navigation, there's a tagging system to help narrow down content.



7-12 vSplash

URL www.vsplash.com

Company In house

URL In house

vSplash is an Indian design firm with a stylish CSS site, well balanced with a sketchbook corporate feel. "We wanted to convey to our audience what we do in a simple yet interesting and natural manner – we wanted the story to be told very quickly," says CEO Umesh Tibrewal. "The design that our artists made on the paper storyboard looked so good that we decided we needed to convert exactly the same thing to the web!" The site has an office-like feel and retains excellent web standards through CSS and some great natural ordering of content. "Since we put the site up, our direct orders and enquiries have multiplied tenfold. The goals we set for ourselves before the redesign seem so much nearer with the response that we're seeing."



"Since we put the site up, our orders and enquiries have multiplied tenfold"

Umesh Tibrewal



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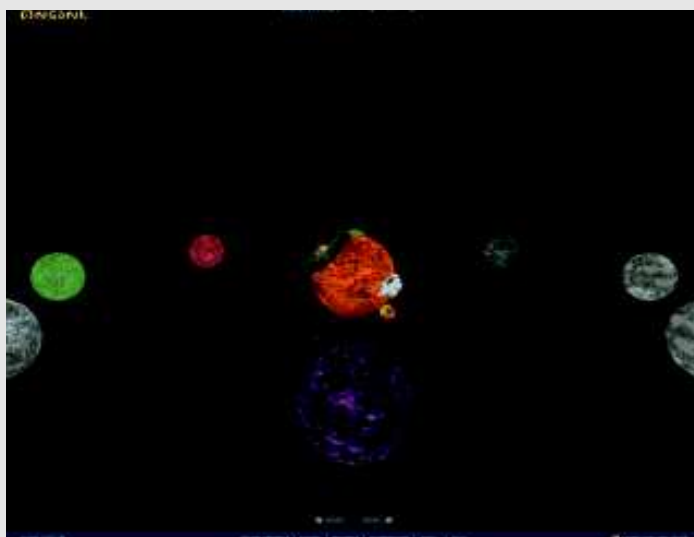
1-6 Bubblewood

URL www.bubblewood.com

Company Vertu

URL www.agencevertu.com

Bubblewood is a concept store with some fantastic components. The main menu is a typographic bubble icon that reacts to the mouse cursor, fluidly moving around it as you click. When the cursor is outside of the bubble it creates a hole in it, but as you draw your mouse in, the words representing each site page become larger as you move over them. It's fast, reactive and fun, but to boost the idea as a concept store, there's a fashion carousel, which makes browsing items particularly speedy. There's even a 3D gallery where traditional red and green glasses can be used to make the images appear in three dimensions. In a fashion world that's dominated by logos and typefaces for slogans, Bubblewood is very of-the-moment.



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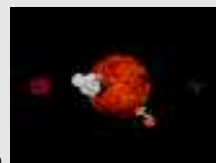
7-11 Angani

URL www.angani.net

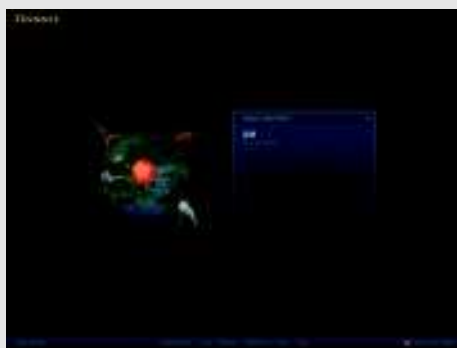
Company Ginga

URL www.agenciaginga.com.br

Angani (the Swahili word for universe or a big space) is a platform built to help users discover interesting and pertinent content online in a unique and interactive way. It's not exactly a search engine, but it does use the social web to deliver content. "We were looking for a lucid and surreal way of creating interaction and showing content," says Ginga's Pedro A Murray Priore. "The personalised worlds were a way to create a unique environment for each visitor to show their personality through content, not by the traditional way of a profile." A Delicious mash-up enables users to find new things related to their interests. The platform offers a 3D environment which enhances the surreal experience.



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"We were looking for a surreal way of creating interaction and showing content"

Pedro A Murray Priore

Want to see your work here? Think your work should be in Gallery? Tell us about it at netmag@futurenet.com



1-5 CLOSED

URL www.closed.com

Company superReal

URL www.superreal.com

"As any fashion brand addresses the user's emotions, we aimed for a rather explorative navigation, which displays the CLOSED collection at its best," says superReal's Flash developer Jörg Lehmann. "We wanted to improve the user's viewing experience with better navigation concepts and state-of-the-art Flash development, such as deep linking and hi-res image loading management." The hard part was preloading and unloading the image data without affecting the user. Combining intuitive usability with an inspiring look and feel, superReal created a drag-and-drop feature and tried to use it across most parts of the gallery. The site was built with the open source PureMVC framework and an XML-based back end.



6-10 Lukas Lindemann Rosinski

URL www.llr-hamburg.de

Company In house

URL In house

Lukas Lindemann Rosinski is an advertising agency based in Hamburg, Germany. Its new website combines the agency's identity design with Papervision3D in quite a clever way. The menu system becomes multi-dimensional, showing off options on all sides of a cuboid structure, which then changes for every page. In fact, the three main columns used for the site menu represent the three partners of the design firm itself. This is seen when you load the site, as each partner is shown to bring the column with their name on it onto the screen. These then turn into the rotating columns for browsing the content. It's a superb example of the power of Papervision3D, with a unique take on a flexible menu system.



"We wanted to improve the user's viewing experience with state-of-the-art Flash"

Jörg Lehmann