
Recollect! The media player that chronicles your life

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Introduction

This concept was developed during a mobile computing project in the Interaction Design Master course at the Malmö University. The goal was to design a new concept of mobile media player. Our result is called *Recollect!* It explores the connection between personal media and life experiences. Nowadays, media are more ubiquitous in people's life than any time before. Using the links that, in our mind, are established between music, images and past life, *Recollect!* seeks to:

- ☞ Classify the media in a meaningful way for the user.
- ☞ Boost the arousal of memories that spontaneously come up when you look at a photograph or listen to a song.

This paper explains the user centred developing process, describing all the tools that were used while we learned them, and introduces some reflections and findings about media, people and memories.

User research: Interviews

In the first brainstorming process we came up with different concepts and according to our preferences and the feedback received at the first presentation we decided to focus on "memories and media". With this thought in mind, we interviewed different people in order to obtain information to create our personas in the next stage, and to listen to their stories about music, media players and memories. We setup the

interviews in a cozy context like coffee shops or university canteen and we choose to interview students between 20 and 30.

Every interview was, of course, different. Some people were addicted to media players, while others listened to music only via YouTube. None of the interviewees had a diary but all of them would like to, if they weren't too lazy to keep it. Apart from persona building, these interviews gave us a deep immersion on the way people interact with media and media players as well as several inspirational thoughts like the existence of "memory boxes" to save physical memories related with the same period of time or the "top ten list of the year" that one girl applied to people, music, experiences...

As a summary, even with a small amount of interviewees — five in this first stage —, the list of personal details that make every user different is huge: Different patterns in media consumption, in memories collection or in media player preferences. It's not possible to achieve a design that fulfils everyone's needs.

Targeting our user group

We took details from the different users that we interviewed to build three different fictional characters: The personas [2][3]. For each one we focused on creating personal goals, psychology, sociology, desires and we also created a graphic image of their life (figure 1). During the whole process we thought in our personas to take decisions about the product and they

were useful to decide what kind of users we should focus on. Our final target user was:

“People who use smart phones/media players and social websites, who enjoy reliving their memories but don’t have the time or the inclination to keep a diary”
Why? From our interviews and from feedback in our presentations we got that:

- ☞ Most people enjoy reviewing their memories.
- ☞ Some people enjoy collecting memories and they spend much time writing a diary or collecting photographs
- ☞ Most people would like to spend more time with their memories: Writing a diary, printing digital photographs but they don’t actually do it.

We couldn’t design this product for the second group members because there are already a bunch of products to bring them into the digital world [5]. Thus, we decided to focus on people who would like to have a better catalogue of their memories but won’t spend so much time doing it. And so then, if they don’t spend time creating the memories, the only way to do this work automatically is to use the information that already exists in the “Web 2.0” and in the users’ every day “digital life”.

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Framing our ideas

At this stage, each one of the group members had its own idea about the concept we were creating. We made our first paper prototypes [fig 1] to show our vision to the others, and from here the debate emerged:

- ☞ How much input the software needed from the user and how much information would proceed from the Internet?
- ☞ Which is the best metaphor to show the information on the screen?

We seek to create a feasible project in the near future, so we look into Facebook, Last.FM, Twitter, iPhoto... and we found that these programs offer the option to interact with them: get dates, photographs, song names... So, using all this information, in combination with geo-position and data exchange, it is possible to establish the links between the media and the people you are with, or the place you are in.



Figure 1: Cat, our first persona

In this way, the more information the users spread in the digital world, the more accuracy their media representation will be.

Defining the product

During the process, we had several discussions around some use qualities from Löwgren’s map [1], and at the end *Recollect!* is based in this three:

- ☞ **Autonomy:** In our concept the product is a fully autonomous agent: The users only provide their information about what online services/ desktop applications they use and leave the rest to the application in order to figure out the best way to rearrange the media according to online information.
- ☞ **Functional minimalism:** Memories and how users like to interact with them is a big arena to play in. In order to get the concept working, we focused on the core value of our application: The software arranges the media library, and the user browses this library.
- ☞ **Anticipation in the interface, surprise in the content:** The interface builds on some kind of mind-map metaphor and presents the user with nodes (memories) and connections between the nodes. The number and possible contents of these connections are limited to three options. This way the navigation and number of choices is totally predictable and easy to use. On the other hand, the actual content you might see when following the connections might be surprisingly rich: connections between events,

friends and places you have long forgotten or never thought about, will be brought back to your mind.

What was more interesting from this discussion is how an apparently theoretical definition of a use quality can help to finish the design of the product. Once we were able to talk about our product in terms of these use qualities, the rest of the decisions came as a consequence.

Testing

Our testing with paper prototypes had the goals of:

- ☞ Testing if users could predict what's going to happen when interacting with each element of the user interface.
- ☞ Detecting if the process that we defined to get results browsing through
- ☞ our media library view was easily understood. In order to get the answer to these questions we created scenarios, and different tasks for the users inside these scenarios [4]. In addition we made paper buttons representing each interactive component of our interface and during the interview one of us changed the screen elements according to the user actions. Because of time constraints we could only did two tests in individual sessions. The users were young students that potentially could fit into our target group. We found out that:
 - ☞ The mindmap metaphor was easily understood. They found without problems the relation between the different elements in the screen.
 - ☞ Was less clear why the content of every mindmap node was showed as a list instead of as another element in the mindmap pattern. We assess the results and the changes that we could do and decided to keep the interface.

Recollect! The final product

Scenario: Cat is a 20 years old student that uses *Recollect!*. She spends much time on her Facebook. She tags photographs, posts status updates, comments... A few months ago she travelled to Lund to visit Brenda. They took tons of photographs and listened to a lot of music. In the background *Recollect!* got the information about position, about the music and the photographs.

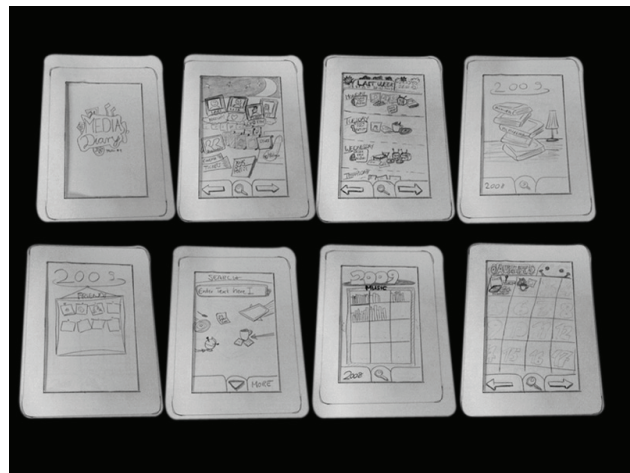


Figure 2: Paper Prototypes: First and last ones.

The system detected that they were together thanks to the GPS position. *Recollect!* also got information from Brenda's Last.FM so the software guesses what music she likes. Today Cat is lying in her bed, browsing through recollect.

In the video

Recollect! divides the information in:

- ☞ Internal elements. The media: Music, Photographs, and video
- ☞ External elements. Ways to relate the media: Friends, Events, Places When *Recollect!* starts, a first screen with the three external elements is showed, and the new updates are retrieved from the Internet. When clicking in any one of the external elements, the new screen shows the list of elements. Cat choose events. After choosing one element from the list (Cat choose an event called "travel to Lund") this element becomes the first node of our memory map. Linked to this node we find the other two external elements (friends and places). When the current active element is selected, it shows its content: Music, videos and photographs. In this screen, *Recollect!* acts like a traditional media player. While playing a song it is possible to go back to the mind map structure to keep expanding it. Every time the situation is the same: friends, events and places linked between them, each one with its internal multimedia content.

The memories in the age of digital materials

In the transition from physical to digital media,

according to our interviews, we found that something was being lost. From the vinyl records “clicks” that keep the story of the scratches, to the value of printed photographs over digital ones. Along our history, through music, movies or novels, physical media has been seasoned with the value of the rituals. In other words, to send a letter and a photograph to your girlfriend is romantically perceived as a set of steps that provides an additional value to the final object: from developing the photograph, to writing the letter. Now all is reduced to pressing forward button and writing a short sentence. As the rituals are lost, the digital object lacks most of the attached values and as a consequence, some of the magic powers related with triggering memories.

Reading or writing a diary, opening the memory box, making a collage; these are processes full of rituals. *Recollect!* is a digital application to be used every time and everywhere but memories are related with emotions and romanticism and while time and surrounded culture doesn't create and enhance this rituals for digital products, the emotional connection with a software piece would be quite low. *Recollect!* therefore doesn't replace a diary or creates these rituals that can enhance the meaning of digital media. Anyway, it can work as a memory trigger and as a personal media organizer.

Future and conclusions

This *Recollect!* concept is pretty finished. To improve and test it, the next prototypes cannot rely on the interface (because it's done) but in personal content in order to test how far the expected use qualities are achieved. In order to do this, a first version of the *Recollect!* algorithm is required.

Despite this future, the *Recollect!* concept tries to take advantage of current zeitgeist: the spreading of personal information on the net, the ubiquity of media player, exposure to digital recordings... All these elements show a scenario with an overabundance of personal media: an issue for traditional classification and a big opportunity for new concepts. *Recollect!* aims to use what we don't forget -our experience- to classify our multimedia content and at the same time, to let us remind details from our experience using this content.

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