



Brand Management Experts “Elevate the Conversation” with Interactive UI Prototyping

Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Professional services

Customer Profile

Headquartered in New York and employing 35 people, BrandWizard provides sophisticated web-based brand management, automation tools for creating marketing materials, and workflow management solutions.

Business Situation

BrandWizard needed a better way of demonstrating the powerful business logic and functionality of its solutions to prospective and existing customers.

Solution

To build and deliver interactive prototypes of its highly customized solutions, BrandWizard deployed Microsoft Expression Blend and SketchFlow technology.

Benefits

- Faster prototype creation
- More effective presentations of user-interface (UI) functionality
- Sharper competitive positioning

“By using SketchFlow to explain the functionality that we offer above and beyond the traditional design elements, we can showcase our effectiveness as a solution provider and as a partner.”

Yelena Shister, New Business Manager, BrandWizard

The professionals at BrandWizard needed to show customers the power and utility of their highly customized brand management solutions, but the company did not have the tools to fully demonstrate the user interface (UI) or business logic. So the company decided to deploy technology for interactive user-interface prototyping, and selected Microsoft Expression Blend design software and SketchFlow technology over Adobe Flash Catalyst. Within a few weeks, the company had used SketchFlow for two major demonstrations, and continues to use it for pitching projects to existing and prospective customers alike. As a result, BrandWizard is building demonstrations two to three days faster than before, helping customers appreciate the value of its solutions, and solidifying its position as an industry leader.

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Fred Gerantabee, Associate Director for
Web and Software Development,
BrandWizard

Situation

Founded in 1998 and headquartered in New York, BrandWizard is a 35-person agency that provides solutions for managing corporate identities and brands to a client roster that includes some of the biggest names in financial services, manufacturing, electronics, and nonprofit business. BrandWizard is a wholly owned subsidiary of Interbrand, a leading global brand consultancy with 1,200 employees in 32 countries, which itself is part of the Omnicom Group, a strategic holding company for businesses specializing in advertising and marketing communications.

BrandWizard is successful not only because of its relationship with Interbrand and Omnicom Group, but also because of its commitment to using web technology in a highly customized way to address every aspect of corporate identity, brand, and workflow management. Depending on the customer's needs, BrandWizard builds modularized solutions that encompass identity management, marketing materials creation, brand update and distribution, localization, and other activities required for managing a corporate identity and/or brand. Each solution incorporates an organization's business logic and workflow to establish and enforce permission levels, automate manual processes, and streamline major endeavors such as refreshing a brand identity.

Because its projects are highly customized and because identity and brand management is based on business logic that itself is highly specific to a given organization, BrandWizard must show customers not only how a proposed identity and brand management solution will look, but also how it will work.

Until recently, however, says Fred Gerantabee, Associate Director for Web

and Software Development at BrandWizard, doing that was a major challenge.

“Using powerful graphic-design tools that have long been available, we could demonstrate the appearance of a site, but we lacked the tools that would enable us to effectively demonstrate its functionality,” Gerantabee explains. “We could use detailed wireframes and text descriptions, but it was still hard to convey to our clients the end-user experience and functionality that are central to identity and brand management.”

Even when BrandWizard representatives were able to explain all this verbally, their jobs were only half done. “We might be able to explain to a project lead how the site would work,” says Yelena Shister, New Business Manager at BrandWizard. “But what happens when that person needs to convey the same information to colleagues, including those whose signoff is needed to move forward? We needed a tool specifically made for doing user-interface prototyping and demonstration, and for doing them more easily and rapidly than we could by using a static mockup and text descriptions.”

Solution

To address the prototyping challenge, Gerantabee, Shister, and their colleagues evaluated Adobe Flash Catalyst and Microsoft Expression Blend design software with SketchFlow technology before deciding on the latter. According to Gerantabee, they based their decision on both familiarity and functionality.

“As a Microsoft Certified Solution Provider, we had used the Microsoft .NET Framework, the Microsoft Visual Studio development system, and other Microsoft technologies extensively; we had worked with a prerelease version of SketchFlow;

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Yelena Shister, New Business Manager,
BrandWizard

and we had been formally trained in the Expression product family,” Gerantabee says. “We also liked the fact that with its built-in controls SketchFlow works intuitively, in contrast to competitive products that focus more on visuals than on functionality and interactivity. More, the versatility of SketchFlow was particularly appealing for us, as we often need to define user-interface functionality before we do any graphic design.”

In less than a week after deploying SketchFlow through a Microsoft Expression Professional Subscription, BrandWizard used the tool for creating a highly interactive demonstration of a proposed portal project to a large financial service customer. In the week following that, BrandWizard used SketchFlow for another interactive demonstration, showing a solution that would support the corporatwide rebranding effort of a major medical supply manufacturer. In the six months following, BrandWizard used SketchFlow for more than three prototype demonstrations. In all cases, BrandWizard provided the brand manager a web link that he or she could access for demonstrations to colleagues.

“By using SketchFlow, we can show essential user-interface functionality without the distractions of concrete design elements,” Shister says. “We can elevate the conversation, whether it’s a new client deciding whether to hire us instead of another firm to develop a branding solution, or an existing client wanting to figure out how a proposed enhancement will work.”

Benefits

Thanks to its new user-interface prototyping solution, BrandWizard is enjoying both quantitative and qualitative advantages. The company is creating and delivering prototype presentations to customers easier and faster than before. The company

is helping customers better understand the value of what BrandWizard offers, thereby differentiating itself among the competition and strengthening its industry leadership. For the future, BrandWizard plans to offer additional value to customers in the form of more effective documentation and training.

Cutting Days from the Prototyping Process

Because the professionals at BrandWizard now can essentially draw a picture of how a user interface or entire solution will function, they are working more efficiently than before.

“We can put together a SketchFlow prototype a lot faster than having to create a static mockup and a text description of how it will work,” Shister says. “This enables us to reduce the prototype turnaround time by two to three days, lowering the cost of producing those prototypes and having them ready to show customers that much sooner.”

Taking on the Competition

For appealing to new customers in particular, BrandWizard can use its prototyping tool to make the difference between a “good first impression and an amazing one,” according to Gerantabee.

“Because we are pitching very customized solutions, a client considering multiple providers will be more impressed by the provider that is delivering an interactive presentation,” Gerantabee says. “Moreover, because of the highly customized nature of what we do, many clients may not fully understand the value that we add. But if they are seeing, say, a static slide presentation from one provider and a dynamic SketchFlow presentation from us, that will help them appreciate the difference.”

“The brand manager can take the SketchFlow demonstration directly to fellow stakeholders for more effective communication.”

Sophie Cadoret, New Business Analyst,
BrandWizard

For appealing to existing customers that are seeking to enhance or revamp their current brand management solution, BrandWizard can use SketchFlow to help strengthen established relationships.

“By using SketchFlow to explain the functionality that we offer above and beyond the traditional design elements, we can showcase our effectiveness as a solution provider and as a partner,” Shister says. “This helps us demonstrate our leadership to clients whose solutions are 5 to 10 years old and ready for major enhancements.”

And whether it is a new or existing customer that BrandWizard is seeking to reach, using SketchFlow helps the company extend that reach. “We may present the prototype to a brand manager, but that individual needs the buy-in of others before moving ahead,” says Sophie Cadoret, New Business Analyst at BrandWizard. “Now the brand manager can take the SketchFlow demonstration directly to fellow stakeholders for more effective communication at that level.”

Offering Additional Value

Going forward, Gerantabee envisions using SketchFlow for not only showing customers the capabilities of BrandWizard but also extending those capabilities. “We will be able to use SketchFlow for providing in-depth training as well as highly interactive documentation of our solutions,” he explains. “That will make our offering that much stronger in the eyes of new clients who are trying to decide between us and another provider, or existing clients who are wanting to learn all they can about what our solution can do.”

Toward that end, Gerantabee and his colleagues plan on creating a custom library of SketchFlow presentations that

they can easily adapt from one project to another. To do this, they will use Microsoft Visual Studio 2008 Professional Edition and, in the future, Visual Studio 2010.

For More Information

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