SOLID

DESIGNING THE RE-DECENTRALIZATION OF THE WEB

SUMMARY

Solid by Sir Tim Berners-Lee is a reinvention of the Web where personal data remains personal. Looking to the future, I designed a virtual reality UI for a Solid Pod Manager, a system for organizing users' personal data and apps in this reimagined form of the Web. I also contributed to Solid and Figma communities with a file containing Solid UI and branding elements for developers and designers.

TOOLS

Figma
Affinity Designer
GoPro VR Player 3.0

> The Web as I envisaged it, we have not seen it yet. The future is still so much bigger than the past.
>
> **Sir Tim Berners-Lee**
> Inventor of the World Wide Web

THE VISION

Increasingly disillusioned with the way the Web was being abused, Sir Tim Berners-Lee envisioned a digital world where every person owns their own data. He wanted to reclaim the Web from corporations and return it to its democratic roots.

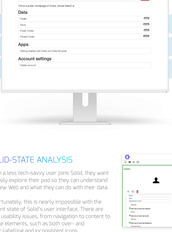
Every person gets "pods" to store and control their personal data, rather than having it split piecemeal across hundreds of corporations.

BRINGING IT TO LIFE

In 2019, Sir Tim Berners-Lee started Solid to "enable the discovery and sharing of information in a way that preserves privacy".

Solid's current approach is making the process of developing Solid apps fast and simple—creating a rich app ecosystem to ensure that the transition to a new Web is as seamless as possible for end-users.

SOLVENT

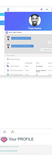


SOLID-STATE ANALYSIS

When a less-tech-savvy user joins Solid, they want to easily explore their pod so they can understand the new Web and what they can do with their data.

Unfortunately, this is nearly impossible with the current state of Solid's user interface. There are clear usability issues, from navigation to content to simple elements, such as both over- and under-labelling and inconsistent icons.

Because of Solid's limited functionality in its present form, it was difficult to visualize its potential, future and the genuine content a pod would eventually contain. To get inspiration and learn more about the status of the Solid project, I turned to existing work on Solid's UI and UX.



EXISTING WORK

Inrupt Style Guide

A live style guide (2019) and mockups (2018) by Inrupt, Sir Tim Berner-Lee's startup. Inrupt Calendy has a vision for Solid, but one catered to the users and trends of the present Web.

Angelo Veltens

A live experimental UI by Angelo Veltens, a Solid developer. While it is a great improvement in terms of UI and aesthetics, it is limited by the functionality of the existing interface and does not add many new elements.

Oh My Pod!

A proof-of-concept Solid Pod Management System by Astrid Landys Aymerich Arrufada, a Solid member. It follows Inrupt's style guidelines while maintaining a personality of its own, but fails to explore the app ecosystem.

THE CHALLENGE

As a prototype, Solid is looking for wider-scale adoption. For those outside tech-oriented fields, Solid may be conceptually accessible but nearly unusable.

How might we lower the barrier of entry to Solid for less tech-savvy users?

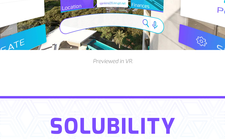
SOLUTION

SUPPORTING DESIGNERS

While Inrupt already had a live style guide, it did not offer any additional support for designers to improve the current design, choosing to focus instead on developer efforts.

To help with this effort, I created and launched a Figma community file containing Solid's branding and UI elements. It is currently used by three Solid community members, including Angelo Veltens.

Solid Style Guide: bit.ly/3ckQAJ



SOLID POD MANAGING SYSTEM

In this UI, the user's profile and personal data files are centred for immediate visibility and to prevent accidental selection by "look-and-hold" VR headsets. Files are on the left, similar to an OS, while the user's digital networks are on the right. The search bar is voice-enabled for quicker access.

The future of user interfaces lies beyond pictures behind glass. The transitioning Web is the perfect opportunity to take advantage of new mediums of interaction as the world becomes increasingly digital.

Previewed in VR.

SOLUBILITY

REFLECTIONS

One weakness of this project was the lack of user research due to the novel nature of the Solid concept and virtual reality. Future investigations may include testing the organization of personal data, adding metaphors from the physical world (avoiding Microsoft Bob's pitfalls), or perhaps expanding the range of interaction beyond simple tapping.

Though the "Wild West Web" has faded into the past, replaced by Paul Otlet's walled gardens, online communities continue to evolve and stake out new frontiers. As a designer, one must constantly keep an eye on what the future holds and how to shape better digital and physical realities.

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