

1. Can you expand on the people-centered innovation that took place?

The Sonos <<http://www.sonos.com/>> design philosophy was to create a product that would allow people to enjoy music anywhere in their home - completely people-centered technology. This is not about intimidating tech that people have to figure out. This is about music. Music is fun. Hence, Sonos should just fit into people's lives. To do this, we looked for a product design language that was "pure" ensuring that the product would be able to blend in anywhere in the home and a user interface that focused on "entertainment and simplicity" to ensure that anybody would be able to use it.

In product design we had 3 basic premises:

The first was "quiet confidence." - We wanted to make sure that it was high quality, but at the same time establish a design language that is subtle. As one uses a Sonos Multi-Room Music System <<http://www.sonos.com/>> throughout a home, it needs to blend in with many different environments so each person feels it fits in their life.

Examples:

We designed the ZonePlayer to hide away discreetly anywhere in your house, so we kept the design very clean and unobtrusive. It's going to be around for a while, and we didn't want it to be dated the minute it came out of the factory (we have pictures of this if you'd like).

Our ZonePlayers are designed to be very compact: with innovations in digital amplifier design we were able to provide a lot of power in a small form factor. The ZonePlayer's case is aluminum because that metal is so good at dissipating heat that the device doesn't need a noisy fan.

The second was "functional elegance." - The system has a lot of innovative technology; it's designed to reveal itself as you use it rather than be in your face.

Examples:

The ZonePlayer has the silhouette of a Japanese lacquer box while the Sonos Controller may remind you of a dish if you look at it from the side. There are also subtle tactile details that are not apparent at first. If you pick up the controller, there's a rubber pad and two rectangles on the side so that it feels good in the palm of your hand.

Designing a range: no matter when you bought a product from Sonos, we try and ensure that not only functionally, but also visually, the products are designed as a range and compatible as a product set.

The third was "innovative simplicity."

We wanted people to say: "Hey, I can use this and enjoy it because it's not intimidating." Again, pure people-centered innovation.

Examples:

To ensure that the design didn't scream "technology" we used house wares as reference to get about from the look of electronic gadgetry. We could have made a transitional product that looked like a traditional stereo, but we believe that the Sonos Digital Music System is a new class of product and wanted to establish a design language that communicated this.

Our system is built upon a high quality wireless network. However, it comes without the hassle. The product is easy to install. With one simple button press you can link multiple products together. All products are aware of each other, so that the user is always able to control and see

what the system is playing throughout the home. The "base" is designed to provide clear guidance to the user on the orientation of the product. It is also optimized for wireless performance and in it, 3 antennas are hidden.

2. What was the methodology?

10 years ago the hot topic was the connected or digital home. Many technologies were developed that should allow people to enjoy a connected home. Only, they never did. Most, if not all products stopped short at implementing a bunch of functionality that was complex to use on a product-by-product basis. To try and have different products work together was an even bigger challenge. The products were technology-driven rather than user experience driven, and people were presented with generic platforms then asked to sort it out by themselves. Of course, this never happened.

At Sonos, the design team took the opposite approach. We had a user focus. Rather than starting with technology, we started with people and their desired experiences. We learned how people would like to experience music in their homes and then designed a system around this. The result happened to be an advanced wireless connected eco-system, but that was not a starting point. Our design process is very inclusive of user feedback. We've held many a user session, in-home visits and alpha programs - all designed to get real-world feedback that we can use to polish our design before we go to market. This care shows in the products.

3. The process?

Music is an ambient experience and most people would love to listen to music throughout their home. Sonos allows this via easily installable music zones that do not require a re-wiring project. In order to accomplish this we needed to redesign the behavior of wireless networks to make them easy to set-up (one button) and to make them become better (not worse) with more music zones in your home.

Sonos also designed a new and unique interface that easily allows people to control their music experience throughout the whole home. Pick any room, pick a song and hit play. Listen to the same song throughout your home or listen to different songs in different rooms. It's each respective customer's choice as to how they'd like to enjoy music, not ours.

In the "old days" people used to listen to 12 songs on a CD. Now, Sonos connects directly to the internet and brings an entire world of music right to your fingertips - right out of the box. People are now able to listen to millions of songs on demand and create their own custom radio stations based upon their favorites. We're moving people beyond just accessing music in their home, to discovering and enjoying NEW music. Then furthering the people connection, our customers move beyond themselves and share their love of music and Sonos.

4. How were insights captured? Translated? Inserted in the design? See #1 and #2

5. What was the logic behind the user interface?

In the user interface (UI) on the Sonos Controller, iPhone application and desktop controller, we focused on a high quality experience with a focus on entertainment and simplicity.

We like our UI to be easy to use; it really is important to us that anyone in the household can use it, not just the typical tech-savvy male.

Examples:

*We have lots of feedback that this is working for us. We hear about kids using controllers and understanding the basic functionality inside of a minute and of husbands saying this is the first technical product that their wives have ever used.

*We OFTEN hear how the Sonos Controller gets passed around at parties so that friends can add their favorite tracks to the Queue without disturbing or stopping what is being currently played. We made this a central part of our UI and were unique to do so - it's a social interface.

*We make the whole system setup very easy, helping people to like Sonos from the first few minutes (which is important), and we make the UI very visual. For instance the Zone menu gives you a clear 'command central' for the household which empowers people and makes them feel in control. Next we make it really easy to choose music from a vast array of sources.

*We also make our products very visually appealing and in the same way that our ID is friendly and appealing, the UI is very approachable.

More here: Rob on UI: <http://www.sonos.com/love/sonosstories/ui/>

And more from Mieke: Mieke on product design:
<http://www.sonos.com/love/sonosstories/productdesign/default.aspx>

More from Sonos' customers: <http://www.sonos.com/love/ownerstories/>