

SongPop sings a new tune with Actions on Google

Challenges

French entrepreneur Mathieu Nouzareth launched FreshPlanet with his brother Romain in New York City in 2009 in order to develop Facebook games. In 2012, they shifted their focus to mobile apps, developing a hit music trivia game called [SongPop](#); the current SongPop2 has over 100 million players. In late 2016, FreshPlanet looked to expand to a conversational interface to stay on top of the latest technology.

“We saw conversational-computing products hitting the market and realized this would become very important in the future,” says Mathieu. “We’re lucky in that SongPop is the perfect use case of what a game could be with a conversational interface.” Being curious, FreshPlanet began to explore the platform. “We wanted to learn what would work for an app like ours,” Nouzareth says. “And we really wanted to have a head start on other companies.”

Solution

FreshPlanet began working on a version of SongPop for the Google Assistant, and an enthusiastic in-house team handled the development. “People love working with cutting edge technologies,” Nouzareth adds. “And the team that worked on the SongPop Action for the Google Assistant was really, really highly motivated.” Overall, Nouzareth describes the development process as “super smooth and very easy.”

To start, the development team created a version of the game for Google Home. Then, when the Google Assistant became available on select Android phones and the iPhone, they made the necessary adjustments to take the leap to mobile. FreshPlanet knew they couldn’t directly translate the voice-activated smart speaker version to mobile, so they thought about what made mobile unique that would let them offer a better user experience.

“We want to take advantage of the unique strengths of every platform,” Nouzareth shares. “For example, we’ve learned people search on mobile with a spoken intent as opposed to clicking inside a list that we show them. We also discovered that on voice-activated smart speakers like Google Home, people wanted to play different musical genres than the ones we were expecting—like more kids’ music.”

FreshPlanet optimized SongPop to keep play quick and snappy. They shortened musical clips, simplified menu choices, and devised a new way to provide hints for correct answers. In some instances, they made decisions for the players, such as choosing a playlist from among 2,000 in the catalog.

“It would be virtually impossible to have users navigate a decision tree to choose a playlist. We’re trying to match the best playlist to the spoken request, so users don’t have to make too many choices,” Nouzareth says. “Everything was new, and it was trial-and-error to see what worked.”

“Developing with Actions on Google is not resource-intensive. It’s fun and it’s insightful. And you can really be ahead of the curve and start to understand now what the interface of the future will be.”

Mathieu Nouzareth
Cofounder & CEO
FreshPlanet

Google provided “very interesting feedback from voice designers” during development, Nouzareth says. Their feedback included adding more variations to phrases used, “repairing” conversations for users stuck in a dead end, and adding punctuation to make conversation more natural. They added new ways to handle instances when a user replied “I don’t know,” for example, and created different greetings for first-time and returning players. They even hid “Easter eggs” in the game to fine-tune the Action and make it more fun and surprising.

Results

FreshPlanet was pleased with the results, gaining new players every day. “We were surprised by how many people were requesting to use the Action,” Nouzareth says. He expects SongPop to continue evolving as Google offers new capabilities and features for the Google Assistant. Players, meanwhile, keep testing their knowledge of their favorite songs and artists, from around the world.

“Developing with Actions on Google was a huge motivation for the team that loves working on cutting-edge technologies.”

Mathieu Nouzareth
Cofounder & CEO
FreshPlanet