

MAPS Summary – November 2002

This month was spent doing a lot of catching up. The first thing I did was to implement a power-point like display of the script, that would expand on the right side of the gui form. This layout would provide a larger view of the created script. It would be an array of 42 nodes, arranged in seven rows of three smaller pictures. This view option can be seen when chosen from the proper menu and will contract whenever the user performs some other action to the script (such as adding a new picture). Another feature of this was if the user were to click on a picture in the power-point view of the script, that node would become the current node and appear in the center of the five-array of node at the bottom of the screen. This view can also be made to disappear with a menu item. The reason we call it the power-point view is because it was modeled after PowerPoint where it displays the slides in small pictures in a scrollable column on the left of the screen.

We gave Camille Dodson, a fellow L3Der our current layout/design of our gui, and had her propose a new design that was less blocky, and smoother. We were very pleased with the results which we will use to make our gui much less Visual-Basic-y. In order to implement this new design, I sought a button control that would allow us to make non-square buttons. I was very successful and for \$80 we purchased a button control that allowed us to not only make different shaped buttons, but also to make buttons in the shape of pictures and lots of other things.

After receiving Cami's design, I gave it a good look-over and identified which elements were missing and which were extraneous in her design. A major difference that we will adapt between the two designs is the color scheme, which Cami did a wonderful job of choosing for us. The other major change was the shape of the buttons, and also changing some of the buttons to be icons rather than words (such as Play Node becoming just the right arrow icon for 'play').

One change that Cami had in her design was to put the array of five nodes vertically on the left side of the screen, but I decided not to implement this because it seemed more intuitive to me to have them be horizontal, especially since the power-point display was a vertical display. If we discover in user-testing that the vertical display is preferred, this will be an easy change, so for now I just left it horizontal on the bottom.

One thing that was missing from Cami's design was file boxes, so when these were added, they had to be resized a little. An addition that Cami made was to have the box where the selected picture is displayed be a different and smaller box than the one that the script plays in when the user selects the Run Script option (a button). I like this change because it separates the design and finished product aspects of the script more, which is more intuitive.

Another thing that we did to change the design was to have the 'delete node' and 'play selected node' buttons become small icon buttons that appear below each box of the five-array. This is much more intuitive I think because then the user can just press the 'play' or 'delete' button below the picture they want to play or delete, rather than having to know which is the selected node, and press the button at the right time.

Cami's design included a few extra features that I deemed unnecessary. These included a name box for each prompt, and a play from current node button. She also had it set up so that someone would choose the picture, the sound, then add the prompt, where

we have already determined that someone may want to only add pictures or sounds and then add the other component later.

Another thing that I added to the gui was a Properties form that has a number of tabs. The only tab on there so far allows the user to choose the directory that the application will open up in. We still have some tweaking of this to do, but in order to accomplish this I had to learn how to read and write from files. To do this I did a proof-of-concept form.

Our next difficult project is figure out how to read and write binary files from the database that can be read from to load a script. This could be easily accomplished in embedded visual Basic, but unfortunately regular Visual Basic does not have the same easy solution.

The plan for next month is to continue converting the gui to the new design. In doing this we are also trying to set up most things so that the colors are controlled by a global and all set on form load, rather than setting each thing individually. This will make things easier if we ever want to change the color scheme.