

# /makeover

# mp3-anywhere.com

The homepage of mp3-anywhere, a tool that enables you to play your music remotely, needed a facelift. We invited designer Daniel Box of renowned agency KNI to work his magic

## The brief

Site [www.mp3-anywhere.com](http://www.mp3-anywhere.com)

Launched Unknown

Brief Site owner Rich Stone was looking for a stronger brand, improvements in navigation and usability, plus a new visual style.



## The designer

Name Daniel Box

URL [www.kurt noble.com](http://www.kurt noble.com)

Areas of expertise Flash interface design, motion concepts and CSS design

**The URL is not misleading: [www.mp3-anywhere.com](http://www.mp3-anywhere.com) is home to a piece of PC software that lets users listen to their MP3 collections from a broadband-connected machine anywhere in the world. The service has ratings, tags, built-in security, friend notifications, stats and much more. What it doesn't currently have, though, is a visually dynamic website to showcase it all.**

I was drawn to the site because of its musical nature and the owner's desire for the site to have (in his words) a "cool Web 2.0" look. While '2.0' may be one of the most overused buzzwords in web design today, there is definitely a style that goes along with it, and for a software site like this, I agreed with his impulse to have a more '2.0' presence for such an impressive application. Cool Web 2.0 musts are: shiny buttons, bright colours, large text, big icons, and the hottest CSS rollovers possible.

## Usability and navigation

The current site seems highly usable. There are large buttons, clear headlines, and not much clutter. The type is easily readable and thumbnails are large.

Those are my first impressions. On closer inspection, there are actually many places for improvement. Link colours are the same colour as the body text and while a few links have visible rollovers, the vast majority of them don't. Because of this, it's hard to tell what is even clickable on most pages.

Then we come to the navigation. Well, that is if we can find it. The site has three large navigation items in the header, but the remaining (yet still important) seven are almost hidden at the bottom of the page. Having to scroll for major navigation elements is probably the biggest faux pas of UI design... ever.

For the redesign, it was a simple fix: just bring all the navigation to the top. The three most important

misleading in terms of the product's main focus, because it doesn't convey the broader scope of the application, which is that you use it to access and play your music collection from any location in the world.

In this way, one of the main focuses of my redesign was to capture all of the application's coolest and best attributes in one glance. Since the main function of the program is to let users listen to their music collections anywhere, the world map theme was used. Large icons illustrate different places where you can access your music collection. And lastly, a photo of a man listening to music at his laptop was used to put the software even more in context and emphasise the awesome portability of the program.

**"Lastly, a photo of a man listening to music at his laptop was used to emphasise the awesome portability of the software"**

Daniel Box

items are still featured and they are differentiated by the lesser items. Crucially, this navigation will be consistent on all sub-pages.

## Brand identity and design

The current logo consists of a graphical mark (a headphone-adorned globe) and type treatment (grey text with a fuzzy grey glow). I briefly contemplated scrapping it all – Yahoo Music and Pepsi Music have pretty similar logos – but after some consideration, I felt that the graphic would work well if accompanied by a more up to date type treatment and a new environment in which it's viewed. With that came the shiny blue colours to play off the graphic mark and help make the site one cohesive piece. Yellow and reds were added to give more graphic punch.

Right now, [www.mp3-anywhere.com](http://www.mp3-anywhere.com) has a bare-bones look to it, which is not atypical for software sites. A lot of the time, the same programmers who build the software also design the sites – they tend to be quite functional, but these types of sites can also feel a bit flat and boring.

Everything is neat and orderly, but to the point of being stale. Compositionally, there are many similarly-sized floating elements and no main anchor for the eye. The site is virtually greyscale, which also adds to the lifeless feeling.

When a user first visits the page, working out what the site is about is a little confusing. 'Your online MP3 player' is the biggest headline. This is really quite

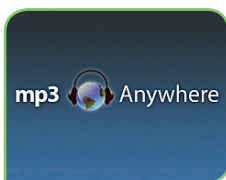
Since selling the product is the goal for Rich Stone, the website owner, I also gave the 'Buy Now' button a major redesign. Following this, the bottom tout areas were next to get a revamp. Bright red call-to-action buttons now help keep the site flowing from the homepage to sub-pages.

## Development

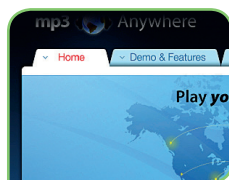
Most of the site will be powered by CSS, PHP and XHTML. This will make for smaller file sizes and much easier updating. For example, the navigation header will be a PHP include of two unordered lists. Adding a new navigation item will be as simple as inserting a list item, but will automatically get styled to the appropriate look, and be updated on all pages.

The large feature area in the middle will be Adobe Flash. On first loading the area will be a large splash overview, but when clicked it will turn into a smoothly animated interactive demo of the software. I would recommend using Flash video for portions of the walkthrough, versus an HTML slideshow (as the site currently operates). There are several different screengrab applications that take QuickTime movies of desktop activity, which could then be converted to Flash video and integrated into the demo.

The only bit of content that I would recommend adding is a mailing list, which would be a great way to keep in touch with the userbase and allow the site operators to notify subscribers about product updates, new versions of the software, and perhaps even other application offerings down the line. ●



**1 The brand**  
 Unlike many past .net makeovers, the brand didn't get a total overhaul. Often something as simple as changing a typeface can really freshen up a logo's look. Also, in the new environment the globe appears to be reflecting the blues of the site below it, which is one more unifying factor. The previous logo was very disjointed. The graphic mark and type treatment felt like two different entities, so for the makeover I combined them into one element.



**2 Navigation**  
 It was very clear that the current site owner wanted to drive traffic to three main areas – Home, Demos & Features, and Support – but that should not result in burying the other navigation elements. Everything is now brought to the top of the page and will be consistent throughout the site. The three main areas still get special visual treatment via the tabs, and the rest get a nice clean layout to the right. These new tabs will be constructed as unordered lists, styled with CSS, and be easily updatable.



**3 The human touch**  
 When dealing with software sites, layouts can often feel cold and lifeless. One simple solution is to add a photo of someone. This makes the design instantly easy to relate to, and it breaks up the monotony of all those right angles. With a website like [www.mp3-anywhere.com](http://www.mp3-anywhere.com), it is important that users instantly know what the software is all about, and an image speaks a thousand words, as the saying goes. Compositionally, it makes for a more dynamic layout, providing a visual anchor point for the page.



**4 Iconography**  
 Since users give websites mere seconds to grab their attention, one good way to make your point and make it fast is with icons. They pack a nice graphic punch while being simultaneously informative. In this case, the user can quickly learn that he or she can use the mp3-anywhere application from any location. Stylistically on these icons, I went with large, clean illustrations with thick, bold lines to add to the '2.0' look that the site owner was looking for.



**5 Tout it!**  
 In web design, there's often one last thing that you have to add to a site that totally wrecks the design! A way to avoid this is to bullet-proof your site with tout boxes – areas that, no matter what you put in them, will hold up visually and never ruin the composition. Screenshots, product updates, contest promotions – no problem. Touts have you covered. They are also great for site expandability by being randomised or rotatable. I went with rounded boxes, unified headers and shiny, bold, call-to-action buttons.

**Pimp my site!**  
 Does your site lack lustre? Could it benefit from a few tweaks? To get an expert opinion, email your URL to [mailus@netmag.co.uk](mailto:mailus@netmag.co.uk)

