Vladislav Golovach

Old projects from Usethics

* See my recent projects on the Kulturvolk website.

A bit of CV

From book design, I came to technical communication. After a couple of years of work on user manuals, I have realized that instead of explaining to users how to perform their tasks, I should go the other way around and make tasks themselves simpler and more efficient. So I have became an UI designer.

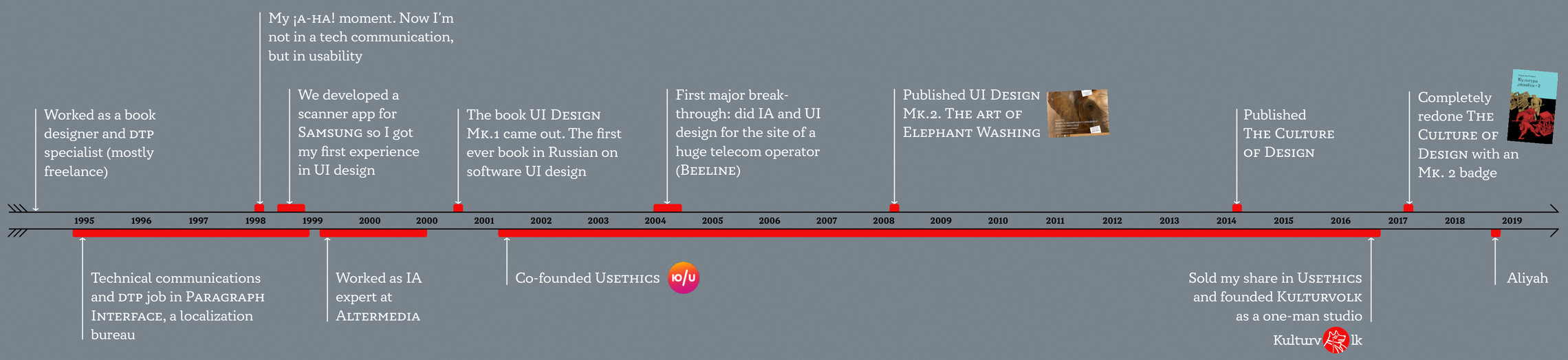
In 2001 I have co-founded USETHICS, the first Russian UI design & usability company and for next 15 years was designer and art-director there. At the end of 2016 I have sold my share at USETHICS with the view of leaving Moscow forever. After a couple of years of solo design practice, I have made Aliyah at the end of 2018.

Literally hundreds of design and research projects focusing on usability & ergonomics and, after that, UX. Tiny part of my projects is to be found below.

Dozens of designers and researchers trained and mentored by me now occupy the top spots in the Russian UI/UX community.

My interfaces are used probably by millions of people. But among them, I am mostly proud in the few who use my UIs for hours a day.

The first-ever original book on UI design in Russian (and a couple of others after that). Also wrote Russian state educational standard on UI/UX and research.



WEB APP • MOBILE APP

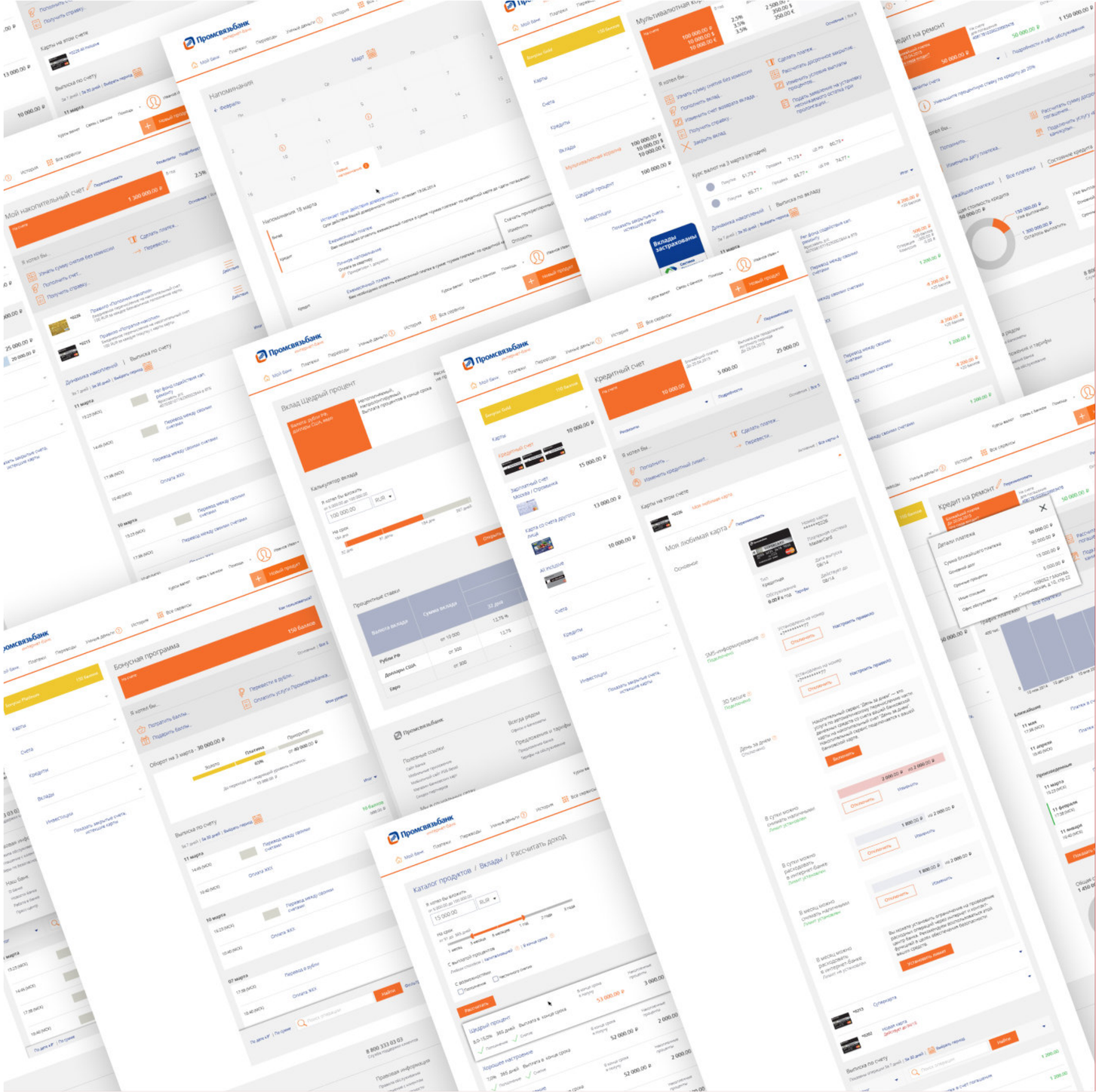
When PromSvyazBank decided to upgrade its online personal banking services, we were chosen to design it (as we have designed the internal teller UIs before).

We have designed both web- and apps (only the web version is shown here). The problems to solve included:

- There were actually two interfaces, one for normal and the other for premium customers. The premium UI is slightly more rich in features and has a different skin so we had to design easily adaptable UI.
- PSB had a surprisingly wide range of online services and features so we had to design the special menu just for customized offers.
- PSB is not the only bank with a loyalty card program, but it was (at least then) the only one without a dedicated site, so we had to integrate loyalty program into the main banking app.

This design propelled PSB ONLINE to the first place of the most trusted rating of Russian online banks (by Markswebb). BTW, besides this one, I have designed two other banking apps. One was even designed for Symbian in the time of yore.

STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWS • INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE • UI DESIGN • USABILITY TESTING



Having 15000+ stores across Russia comes with special worries. For X5 Retail Group one of them was the location of stores. Some are underused not because of bad operation, but because of lack of pedestrian traffic and/or vicinity of other shops (even the ones belonging to X5 itself are stealing foot traffic). Some are overused but there is no free commercial space in the neighborhood. So X5 employs a small army of retail scouts who map residential homes and commercial spaces to find the best locations for new stores and monitor the competition in the vicinity of existing ones.

Scouts are using custom mapping software on iPhones marking estimated population (the size of residential buildings, the number of floors and entrances) and objects of interest (other shops, vacant retail spaces, crowded POIs, etc.). On the backend, the data is analyzed and teams of expert developers and renters are sent to prospective locations.

We had designed both the scout's app (shown) and the backend analysis system. While the backend is pretty generic, the scout's app is well-optimized for rapid usage.

I have worked on many business systems, but only a few were smartphone-only.

Cashiers at the Russian Post are taking countless parcels to send. There is a great variety of parcels, their destinations, and types of delivery. Moreover, the provisions of delivery are often changing making the old UI instantly obsolete. We were chosen to design a universal, fast and easily updatable UI.

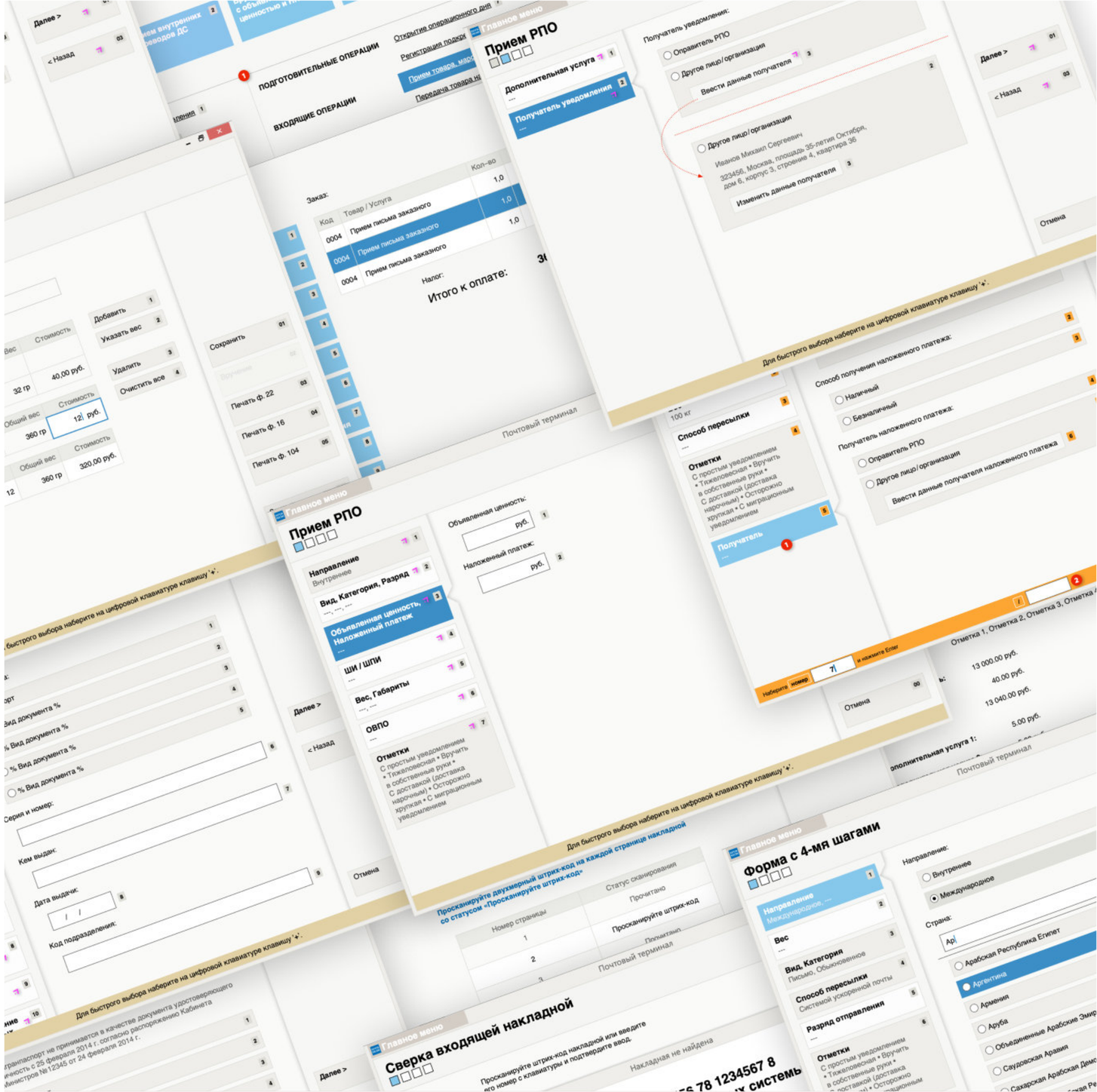
The interface had to be very flexible but at the same time very consistent so that users do not need to learn each and every action. Also, the speed of interaction was paramount, making mouse input undesirable (keyboard is faster). So I have designed a very rigid three-pane interface:

- The left pane for navigation. It also indicates details of the current order.
- The right one shows the constantly changing alternatives for delivery options. For example, if the weight of the parcel exceeds the set value, the list shortens as variants of cheap deliveries are no longer viable.
- The middle pane is the only place with which user normally directly interacts.

This way when some delivery option is changed on the back end, only a small part of UI reflects this change.

I have also used old-style 'type the number' keyboard input in which users are not required to follow the predefined tab order for keyboard navigation. The user has to just press the number on a numeric keypad to instantly jump to the corresponding field or screen. This way the post workers can take order not in the way dictated by the UI, but by order of client preferences.

We have designed a couple operator's UIs but this one has turned to be the fastest one.



When Azbuka Vkusa decided to open a chain of small deli stores with self-checkout, we were chosen to design the custom UI (hardware and underlying software were developed by another company). All existing checkout terminals were considered unworthy so we have started from scratch.

Before the project, we had no personal experience with self-checkouts so first thing we ran to other shops with self-checkout to buy themselves snacks, lots of snacks. The experience was terrible. The UIs were ugly (even uglier than current Shufersal checkouts), the on-screen instructions were cryptic, the process was slow and frustrating.

It turned out that process was slow and frustrating for a reason — there were countless background checks to combat theft (for example, you can't just scan a bottle of water and pay without placing the bottle on the hidden scales on the side of the machine).

So we became pretty busy hiding the corners we weren't able to smooth and fixing the steps where we were able to find workarounds.

We did extensive testing on the crude cardboard prototype of the device (and later on the real machine) in search of the best copy for on-screen help, the best places for controls, etc.

Usually, we were not involved in the visual design (like on the site of AV, where we did only crude graphics), but here we also did all the visual work.

Now the machines are installed not just in small delis, but also at regular Azbuka Vkusa stores. The interface and the graphics are left largely intact.

ONLINE STORE AND CORPORATE WEBSITE • 2013

AZBUKA VKUSA is a leading upmarket food retailer in Russia. As their internet presence was lacking, they have decided to create a brand new site and — finally — start selling their goods via internet. But there was the catch — AZBUKA VKUSA prides itself as selling the freshest produce and perishable goods. And it's hard to deliver fresh stuff with any reliability.

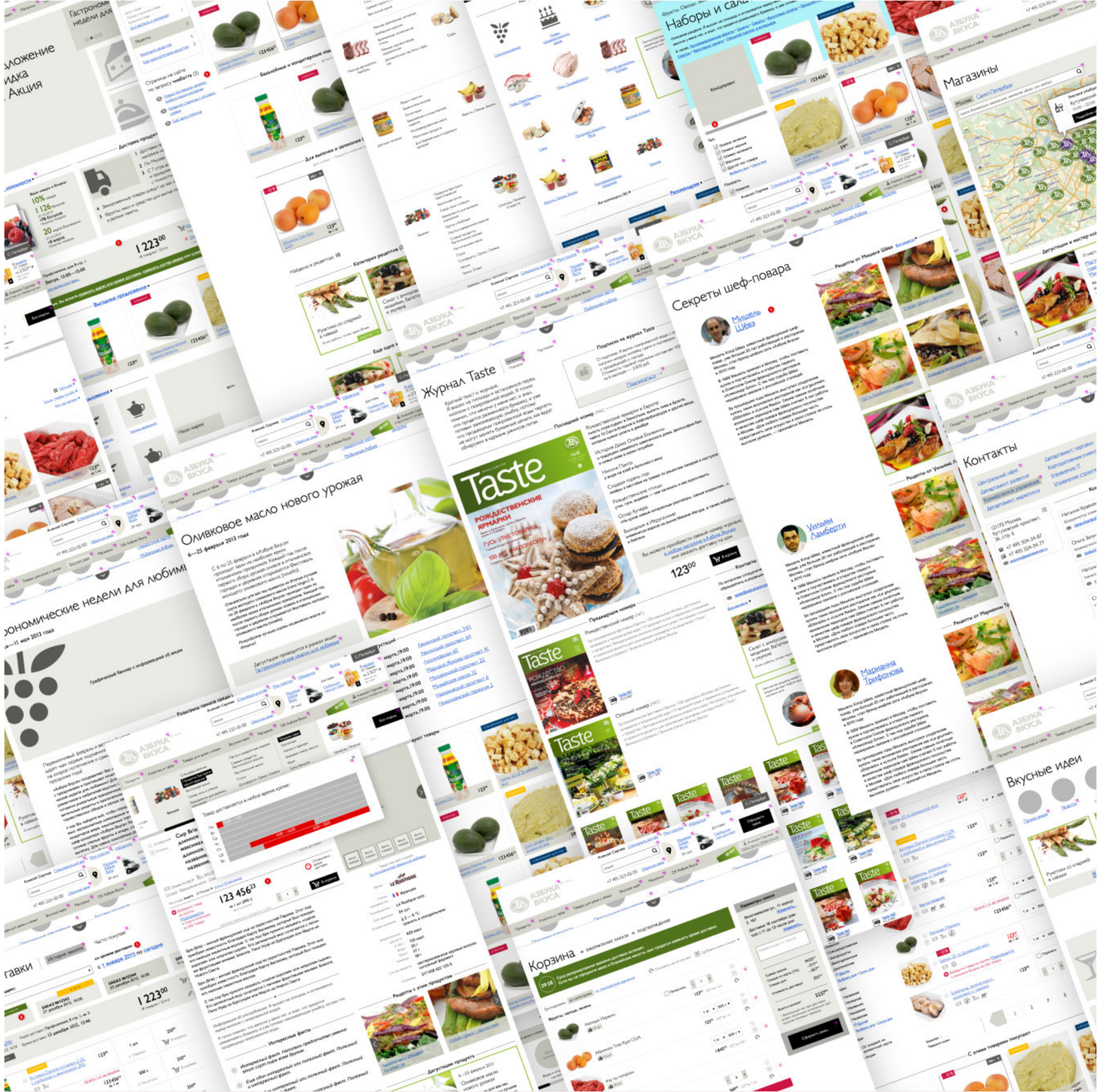
There is no way to sell specific apples instead of generic ones through the internet. For example, if the apples are marked as 'not particularly fresh by the day after tomorrow' there is no point to deliver them tomorrow, you have to deliver them today — and you cannot deliver another sort of apples instead. The same is true for all quickly perishable goods. As AZBUKA VKUSA sells specific goods of the highest quality and not the generic ones, we had a problem — normal checkout logic was simply unfeasible.

Instead, we were forced to design very specific buying and checkout processes in which the customer is nudged to set a delivery time before buying (and probably before even starting to browse the shelves).

As AZBUKA VKUSA sells not calories and vitamins, but a taste, we have designed a series of supporting tools and services, such as recipe book in which you can directly buy ingredients for the chosen recipe. We also designed a corporate site with a flair of posh.

I have worked on other online stores, but this one was the most complex one. Also, it's nice to know that (although the site is old) most of our design is still here.

STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWS • INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE • UI DESIGN • USABILITY TESTING



WEB APP

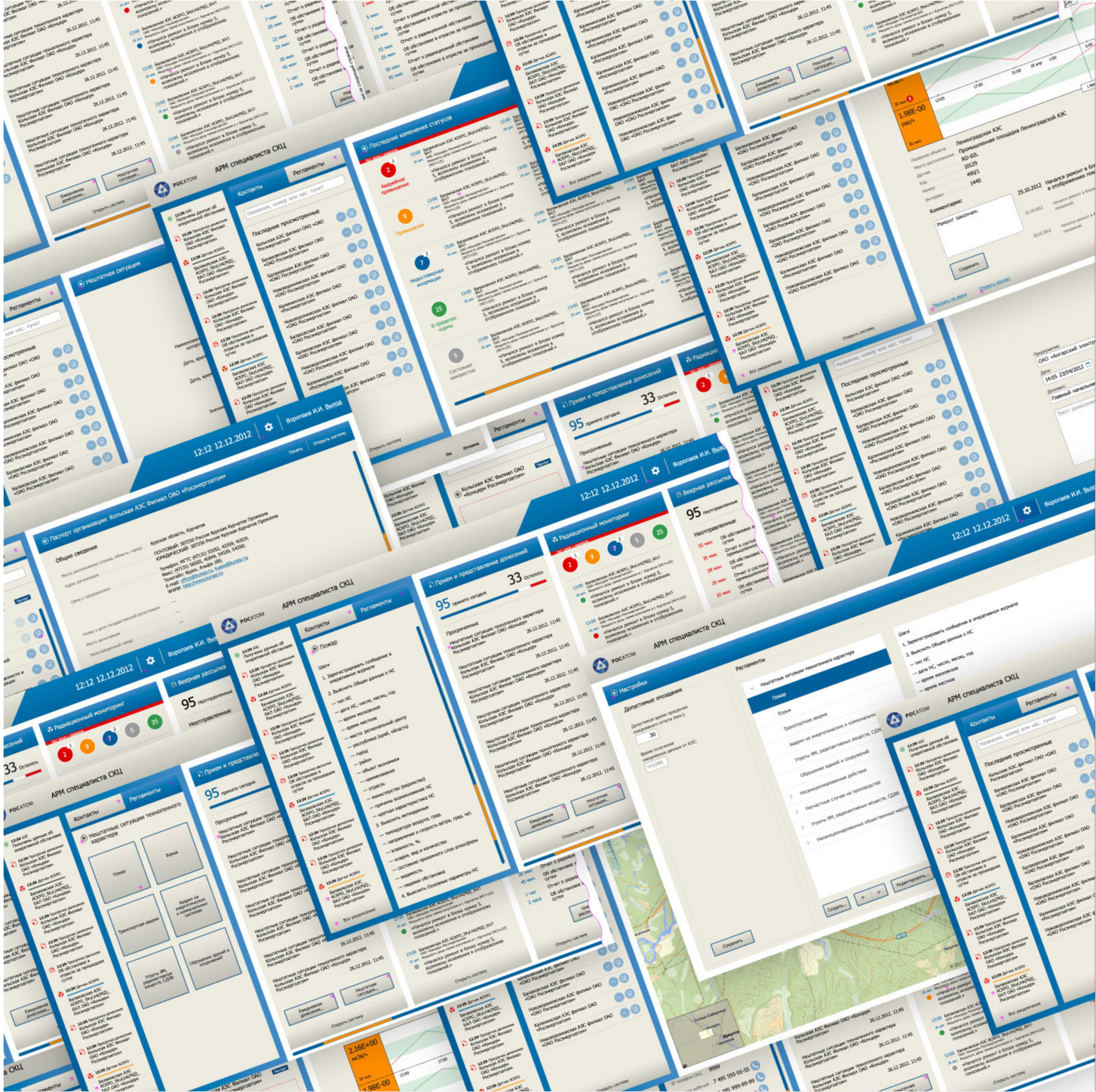
ROSATOM STATE NUCLEAR ENERGY CORPORATION is a Russia's Ministry of Atomic stuff. It oversees any use of radioactive substances, manages atomic energy production and do a lot of related tasks. The small operations center inside ROSATOM is busy monitoring all this.

The operators inside the OP center daily consult various databases and business systems. To make their activity more efficient, we have designed three systems, one of which was a monitoring dashboard.

The primary goal of the project was to provide a single UI for managing the most frequent operator's tasks. So I have designed a wide, horizontally scrolled set of panes which show the most important data from various other systems. Some panes are for data display only while some are meant for heavy interaction (such as a phone book).

It's not the only dashboard I have designed, but the only one with a semi-real-time data display.

STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWS • USER RESEARCH • UI DESIGN • VISUAL DESIGN

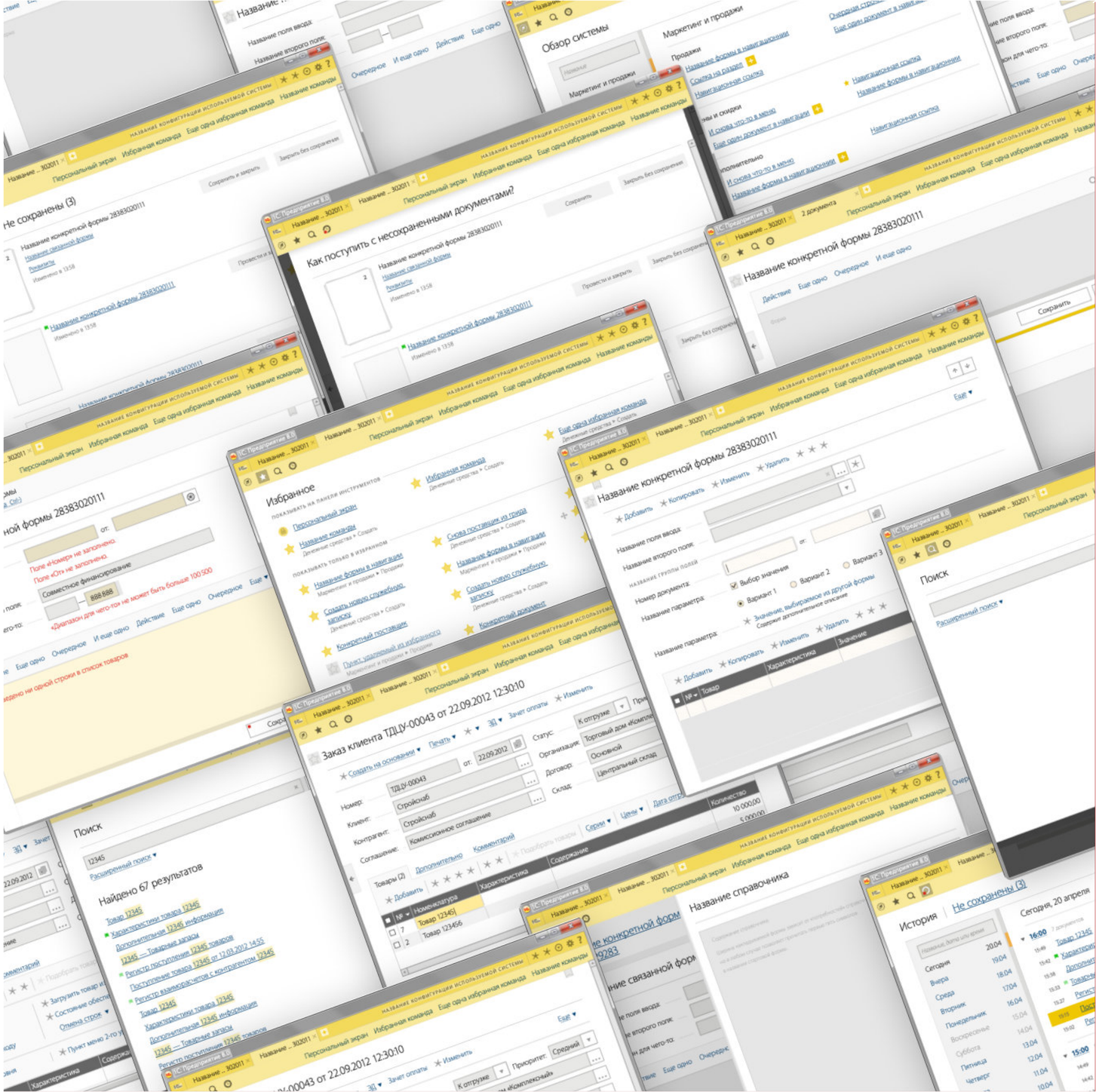


The 1C PLATFORM powers hundreds of thousands of businesses (both in Russia and abroad) being the foundation for countless systems from retail management to education. Having a long history, the platform UI was heavily dependent on the multi-window interaction model. This model was not very efficient in the first place (users had to spend time and effort managing tons of windows) and became utterly outdated when platform transitioned into the browser. Having a successful track record with 1C, we were chosen to design a brand new navigation concept.

We have designed the concept that became the so-called TAXI UI from 1C v8 — modern, easy to learn and master, fluent. To do so, we did several different prototypes by different (not interacting between themselves) designers. Then we evolved each prototype to solve all stated problems from the brief, and just then took the best solutions from each one and distilled them into a single UI design.

Such concepts rarely go into production as-is as feasibility issues generally tend to water down the most radical solutions. But this project was a nice exception. The concept was used in full with some improvements from 1C (for example, document tabs were moved to the bottom of the screen).

Later I have art directed another concept UI for a business systems constructor, this time for KROK, a huge Russian software integrator.

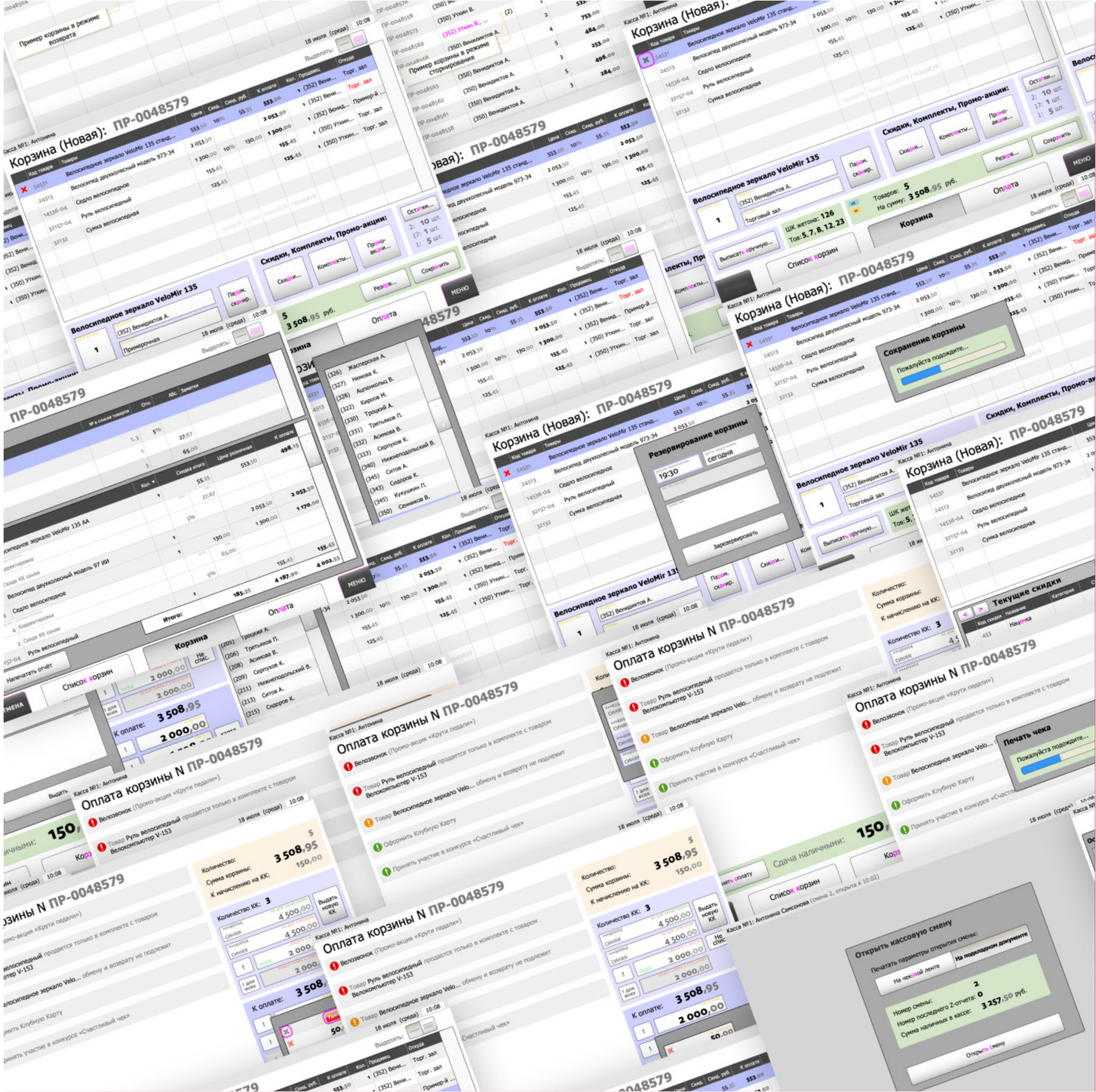


SPORTMASTER, the leading sports retailer in Russia, operates lots of sports supermarkets with complex loyalty programs and huge inventories. To reduce queue times on the checkouts SPORTMASTER decided to develop new proprietary cashier terminals with (then new) touch screens.

Usually, the activity of cashiers is very strict (do that, then that). But complex loyalty programs tend to break the flow as cashiers are required to upsell the merchandise ('why don't you buy more of these to get a personal discount?'). Plus there are little details that make the cashier work way more complex and error-prone (such as split payments).

We have designed a very easy terminal UI with huge touch targets considering the small size of the screen. We even commissioned a custom font for prices display (with so-called 'old-style' minuscule digits as they are much more recognizable).

Later we have designed one more, wastly less complex, cashier terminal for SPORTMASTER (now used mostly in China).

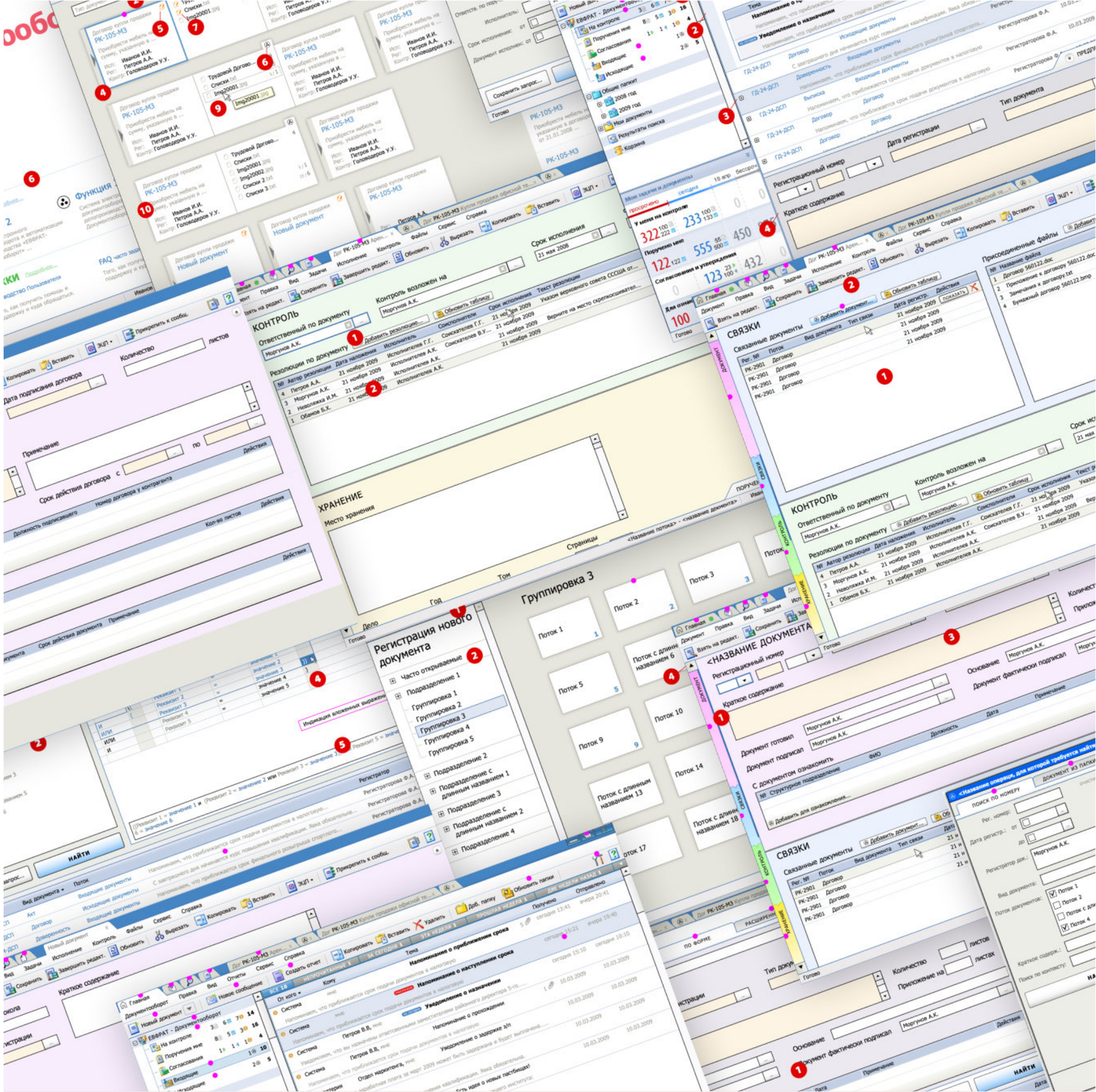


E1 EUPHRATES (E1 ЕВФРАТ) is a full-fledged electronic document management system designed for large, primarily governmental, organizations. The previous version was über complex. It was decided to upgrade the UI making it's more efficient while retaining all the bells and whistles.

I have designed or art-directed a lot of proprietary business systems but this one was special as we were given carte-blanche. Usual laments of developers 'But it is too hard to implement!' were thrown away as exactly this attitude has made previous versions so complex and ugly. So we went as far as possible with inventing new stuff:

- Users normally work with several related documents at once, constantly switching in between. To speed-up switching we used not just tabs (itself a novel approach at the time) but tabs automatically grouped by context.
- As forms tend to be very long, the navigation inside the single document was very important. We have designed a mechanism to quickly switch between sections and to collapse all that is not important at the moment.
- The history presented as a list (like browsers do even today) was completely inadequate. So I have invented a summary screen with documents listed in task-related groups. Recently Microsoft has done a similar thing with Timeline in Windows.

The E1 Euphrates is still being sold and used with the same UI, notwithstanding its age (although the switch to the browser is imminent). The experience from this project was extremely useful in another project — UI for CONSULTANTPLUS, the leading law and best practices database in Russia.

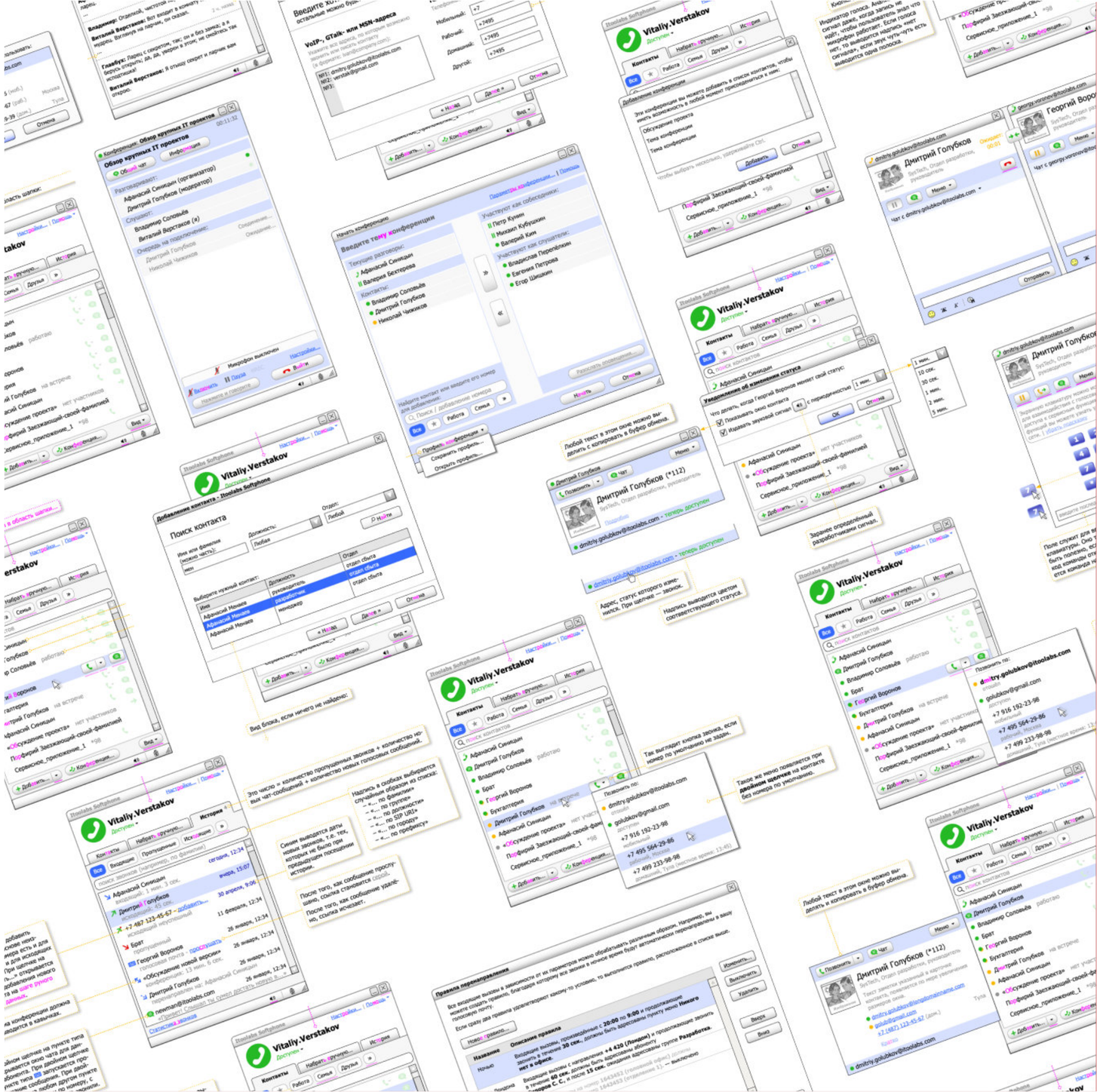


Corporate softphones and IM communicators are filled with features (presence, rich chat, conferences, etc.) which makes them hard to use and therefore hard for us to design well. Softphone from iTooLabs was intended to overcome all that.

Just a normal UI design project. The only difference was the insane amount of tiniest changes and optimizations as this particular product is not used per se, it's used while doing other stuff. So we had to reconsider every design decision to make UI as non-obtrusive as possible.

Plus, there were a lot of microinteractions which are pain in the arse to prototype properly. Thankfully, the code was built at the same time, so developers were able to test our designs really fast.

The resulting UI is still used in the product (albeit with upgrades due to new features and changes in Windows). Later I have art directed another IM, this time for Mail.ru.



Members of Russian Parliament (Duma) are voting on a special little screen mounted on their desks. And I have designed the dedicated UI for that.

The main challenges were the pathetic anti-vandal touch screens used. They were tiny and had the worst glare and color rendering I have ever seen. The touch technology used detected only presses and therefore forbade any fine touch interaction. To make matters worse, the Duma officials demanded the use of rich textures notwithstanding the quality of the screens.

Also, this was a real-time system (there is a short time frame for voting on each issue) which always complicates UI design.

Finally, this voting system was made for virtual idiots and no on-screen help or onboarding was even distantly feasible.

To overcome all this I had to:

- Design simple and consistent navigation and interaction model. I have chosen to divide the screen to display (left) and interaction (right) areas and to map all the buttons on the right ribbon.
- Constantly test the UI on the target screen. It took a lot of effort to choose readable colors and find the proper size for touch targets.
- Redone every project decision to make it simpler again and again.

After the system was deprecated the quality of laws passed by Duma has been sadly reduced. I'd like to think that it's a matter of causation instead of correlation.

CORPORATE WEBSITE • 2004

BEELINE, the first Russian cell operator, planned a rebranding and urgently needed a new site. The technological landscape was rapidly changing, more and more people began to use the mobile Internet (yet it was a couple of years before the iPhone announcement). There were a lot of stakeholders (voice, services, VAS, internet, corporate) with vastly different interests and goals, none of which was satisfied. In other words, it was time for a complete overhaul.

It was a relatively early age of the Web, so there was little leeway in UI design: we had to do what was possible (so top expanding menus, nothing dynamic, etc.). To complicate matters, I was not allowed to see the new corporate identity until the project's last stages due to secrecy and to the fact that the identity itself was still a work in progress.

So the majority of my time was spent doing stakeholder interviews, managing feasibility issues and upgrading/redoing prototype after each and another interview. In the end, the responsibility to choose what will go to the new site (and what will be left out) came to me as the only person not involved in corporate politics of some sort.

Even initial usability testing rounds had shown that the new site was incomparably better in every respect with the old one and with competitors'.

The success of this project propelled us so much that I have ended (later, at various times) art directing UI for sites of both BEELINE's main competitors (MTS and MEGAFON) not to mention various VAS for all of them and a set of subscriber's apps for MEGAFON.

ANALYTICS • STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWS • INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE • UI DESIGN • USABILITY TESTING

The End

Note that I have skipped here projects where I have only worked as an pure art director and was not involved as a designer (or co-designer, or researcher).

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