

APB Reloaded

Feedbacks English version

June 12th 2014



EXOSTATIC

Presentation

Released in 2010, APB has a strong active community.

Although the game is rich in content (vehicles, weapons, missions etc.) the retention is quite low. The extremely steep learning curve can explain part of this issue but many other elements also have an impact.

This document pinpoints several elements that could be improved and/or reviewed to increase ARM (acquisition retention monetization).

The different analysis below can be further improved by exploring the different design and balancing documents from APB (ex: how are rewards awarded, what parameters influence the amount, what's the progression curve etc.)

Naturally, each section has different data points that can and should be tracked to see if players are acting the way that was intended or not. In any case these data collected should help adapt the game to its player base and increase ARM altogether.

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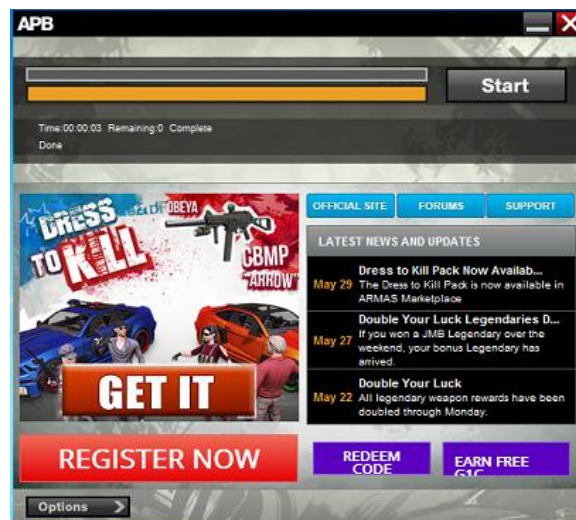
Launcher

Display

Design

Although the launcher may seem secondary, it actually plays a very important part in player retention. The launcher is the first element of the game a player will encounter and he has to feel comfortable with it. Using a display similar to other games gives the player the impression of already knowing the game and reassures him.

The current launcher is the following:



APB – Current Launcher

Issues

A few elements can be noted:

- Start button is gray
 - Usually gray start buttons are used when the game is not playable
 - Since it's a gray button on a gray background the button doesn't stand out (The new player actually has to search for it)
- The "Register now" and "Get it" buttons are the ones that stand out the most
 - For new players having the "register now" button is interesting, however when they reach the launcher they already downloaded and installed the game; at that point it's most likely players are already registered and/or won't mind going one step further to register.
 - Ex: in many games (such as "League of Legends") the launcher displays the latest news, some information and a big "play" button. Once they click play, players end up on the login page where they have to enter their credentials. If they are not registered yet there is a link to do so just below.
 - Note that for players that have medium / slow computer, getting to the login page is already slow so if they aren't registered yet going back to an internet page may take a

lot of time. Creating a light login page similar to League of Legends would make it easier for players with slow computers

- For returning users having a big “register now” button is useless and this area could be used for other purposes
- The “get it” button is a great element to have for the latest packs however the colors chosen are not optimized since it looks like a “no entry” sign (see below)
 - White text on red background is deeply anchored as a “no go” in players’ subconscious throughout the world
 - Naturally this can be said for the “register now” button as well
- Many buttons have different colors which makes it hard for players to track
 - Grey = play
 - Red = register + shop
 - Purple = free G1C or items
 - Blue = websites
 - Etc.
- Some buttons seem to be of low importance on a launcher
 - The “redeem code” and “earn free G1C” don’t need to be the first thing a player sees, they can simply be accessed through the shop
- Some buttons are cropped on different resolutions (“redeem code” and “earn free G1C” on the screenshot above)
 - This can have a negative impact since it doesn’t seem very trustworthy



APB – “Register now” button



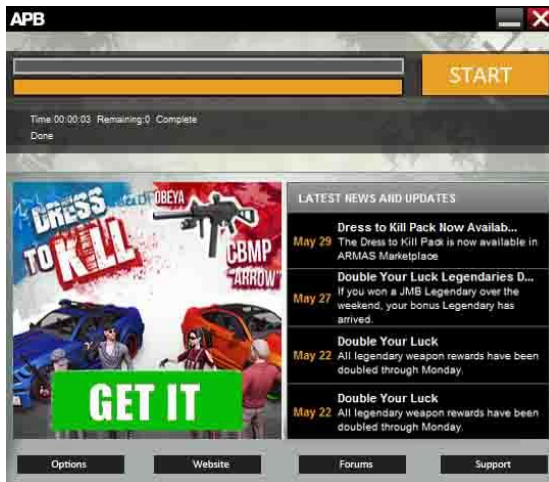
No entry

Recommendations

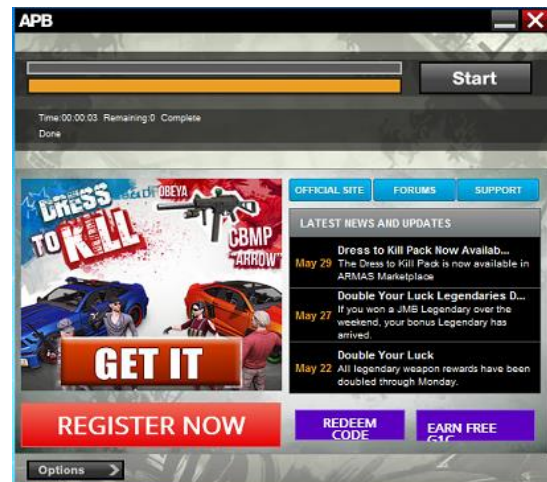
As seen above many elements don’t necessarily need to appear on the launcher and can simply be pushed to other pages. For example:

- Make start button more visible (size + color)
- Remove unnecessary buttons
 - Move “register now” button to the login page
 - Move “redeem code” and “earn free G1C” to the shop page
- Improve color palette
 - No white on red
 - Red and blue are part of the IP identity but in that case it’s better to use blue rather than red
 - Make sure the right buttons stand out

Below is an example of what the launcher could look like (naturally artists will know best how to make colors speak for themselves)



APB – Suggested launcher



APB – Current launcher

BI

Naturally the efficiency of a launcher can be measured through BI. By gaining visibility on the following data we could pinpoint exactly what players expect and what works and doesn't

- Time spent on launcher
 - Differentiate players that left the launcher, those that clicked "play" and those that actually followed different links
- Button selection
 - % players that clicked "play", "X" (left the launcher without starting game) or any other button
 - Separate new users from returning users
- Identify players that left the launcher (by clicking "X") and check if and when they came back + if they went up to the game this time or not

Loading time

Design

Loading time may vary from one computer to another depending both on specs and internet connection. However the average we got is way above what we can find in competition.

It's important to keep in mind that **players are impatient** (which is also a great monetization lever) if it takes too long to start the game chances are they'll move on to something else. After a few tests we obtained:

Action	APB (sec)	Diablo III (sec)
Click launcher - launcher opens	4	3
Launcher – main menu	80	15
Select play – in game	63	36
Total	147 (2.45min)	54 (0.9min)

BI

Although we tested several times the loading time, our specs and internet connections do not represent the majority of players. It's important to check the following data to see if loading time can be an issue

- Launcher loading time
- Main menu / login page loading time
- Login time
- Game loading time

By tracking these different elements for each connection we can then analyze the main trends and locate issues.

- Average and median login time
- Upper and Lower Quartile
- Upper and Lower Whiskers
- Set an objective and see % of players that exceed it
- Etc.

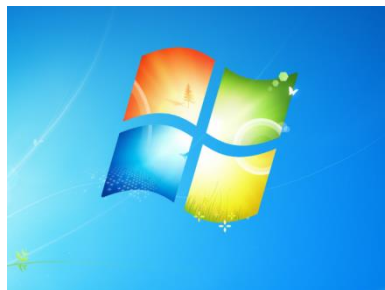
Feedback

As seen above the game loading time is quite high and appears even worst by the fact that there is no feedback that the game has launched.

1. The player is on the launcher and selects play
2. The launcher disappears and the player has to wait over 30 seconds (and up to a minute in the worst cases) for an APB screen to appear
 - During that time the player has no idea if the game is launching or not and can be very confused (did it crash? Is it lagging? ...)



Player selects play



No feedback for over 30 seconds



APB screen appears

We highly recommend giving clear feedback to the player that the game is launching and that **as soon as he clicks "play"**. For example make sure the APB screen appears as soon as player clicks play and add a loading bar or a loading icon.

Tutorial

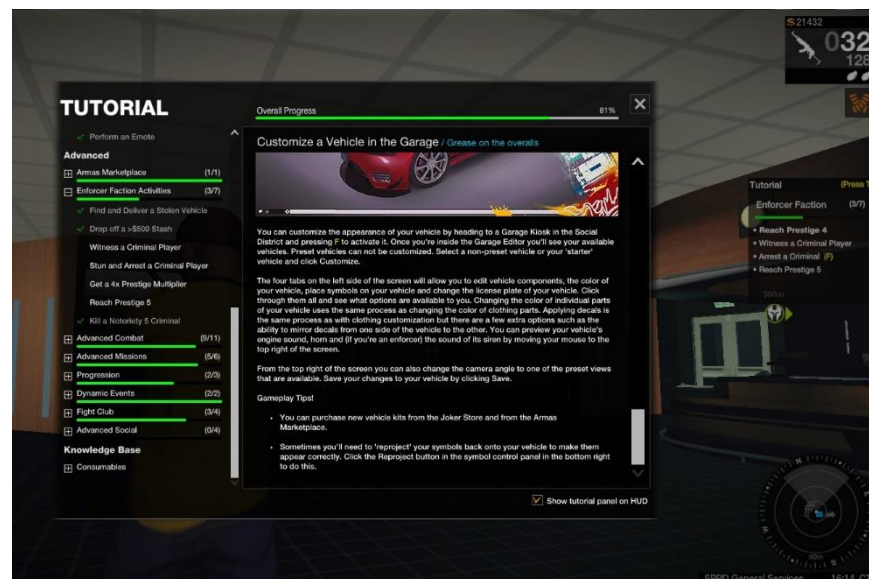
Design

For new players the tutorial is crucial as this is when they discover the game's gameplay.

Issues

APB's tutorial can appear very confusing to players as it's very different from other games.

- Tutorial is long and hard to follow with odd and/or unclear objectives
 - Ex: completely unload a weapon for example, open a door (the doors at the spawn location can't be interacted with)
 - At some point, it requires players to regularly look in the tutorial explanation for him to understand how to accomplish objectives, greatly slowing down the action, and requires reading a lot
- Tutorial lets players decide what they want to do, doesn't guide new players
 - This makes the tutorial feel more like achievements than a tutorial: a list of elements to complete that gives a reward at the end and takes a long time to achieve
- Tutorial contains a lot of text
 - Players are lazy and most of them won't bother reading the way the tutorial has to be completed
- Players are "abandoned" in the game with many other players of different skills and no clear objective
 - Tutorial should be finished before going into PvP. Players have to know the basics of the game to fully play it
- Tutorial doesn't cover/explain key elements
 - Ex: progression, different currencies, mission importance etc.



APB – Tutorial contains a great amount of text, should display the essential information

Recommendations

Having a clear and complete tutorial is very important for a game. Although APB's tutorial covers a lot of different elements (with the "basic" and "advanced" tutorial) it lacks in clarity since players can complete different elements without knowing it. Different approaches could help that:

- Create a special district where players are alone
- Create a scripted tutorial where players have to do some tasks a in specific order interacting with an NPC
- Explain the key elements (progression, threat, ratings, districts, spawn points...)
- Make sure players explore the shop at least once
- When they completed every task of the tutorial (5-10min) make them join a district and pledge to a contact

BI

BI can teach us a lot on the players' reactions to the tutorial. By gaining access to the following data we could analyze their behaviour.

- First player login time and date
- Time & date when each section of basic and advanced tutorial is completed
- Last player login time and date
- Tutorial completion % after each session

With the above information we could see

- What % of player base completed entirely the tutorial?
- What sections of the tutorial are almost never completed?
- What % of the tutorial did players that left the game complete?
- ...

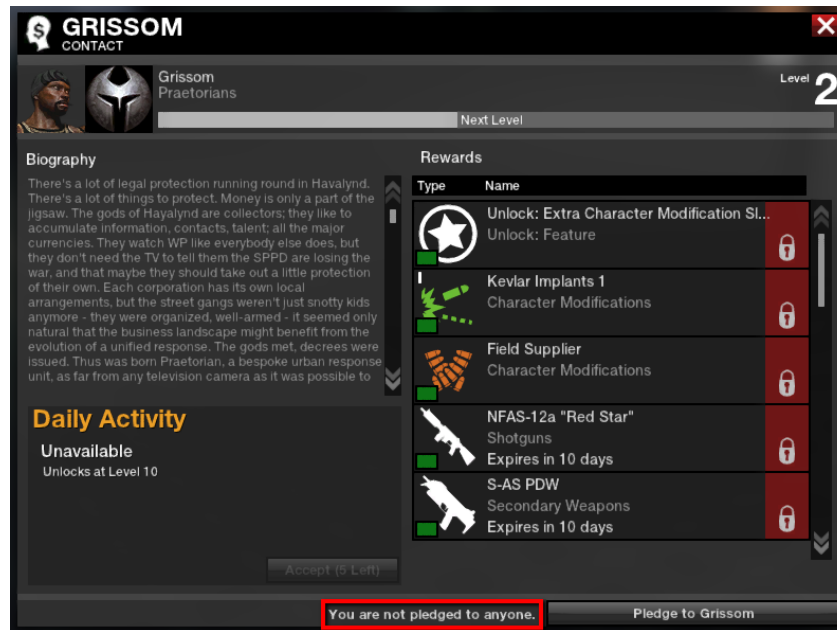
With the suggested scripted tutorial a simple funnel could be used to see at which step players drop out.

Progression

Design

Progression is a key element in free-to-play games, as it keeps players engaged in the game and is a strong monetization lever. A mastered progression ensures that players come back while encouraging monetization and regularly rewarding players' efforts.

- The grinding time just to unlock items seems very high even for a free-to-play game. Players who don't see the end of their task might drop off because it is too time-consuming to unlock everything.
 - Non-payers are very important as they represent most of the players in a game. To keep them engaged they must feel that they can access the entire game without playing thousands of hours. Note that gaining access is different from having enough money to purchase the item.
- Rating levels are supposed to be the long term objective, however there is no information displayed for the player to let him understand the utility. Also it is displayed in such a way that it looks like a currency in the menu.
 - Rating levels are the sum of the levels of contacts the player has. However this is not an information we can find in-game, it should be explained in the tutorial:
 - For example:
 - How does the player win "Rating" levels?
 - What is the "experience" used to level up? Standing, number of win, cash, score ...?
- Unlocking weapon modification slots by using the number of kills made by the weapon is a good feature as it challenges players on their ability to master the weapon. However, it requires a great amount of kills before unlocking the most interesting modification.
 - Like contact levels, players should often be rewarded so that they stay engaged in the game. Currently the number of kills is very hard to reach and can easily get very frustrating.
- The many progressions are confusing, new players have to deal with 4 different levels (Threat, Rating, contact, Prestige/Notoriety), and the differences are not clear.
 - Progression should be explained in the tutorial. They should be introduced to the player one by one so that he can assimilate and understand how they work.
- Pledges are lost from one connection to another. This might be confusing for players to pledge to a contact every time they connect.
 - Pledges should be kept from one connection to another until a player breaks it. It is not clear that Pledges are broken when player is disconnecting resulting in random pledges that players might not want.



- Factions are different only on a few points. However it is hard while being enforcer to maintain a high prestige. Criminals can basically do whatever they want and their notoriety will rise.
 - During gunfights and pursuit, it is hard for enforcers to avoid killing citizens or destroying environment. Progression of Prestige is slowed down by a set of rules that are hard to maintain in an open world.

BI

The progression (SC and XP) should be properly **balanced beforehand** with all the possibilities analyzed. For example using parameters such as win/loss ratio, average kills, premium or not, # session / day ...

Once everything is properly set it's important to check data to make sure everything is going as planned:

- Average standing won per mission
 - Differentiate the different parameters: premium, threat levels, win/loss ...
- Average time spent per mission
 - Differentiate premium or not and threat levels
- Average SC per player
 - Differentiate the different parameters: premium, threat levels, win/loss ...
- Average Kills per player (both missions & fight club)
 - Average kill per missions or fight club per player
 - Check the average based on parameters such as threat, ranking ...
 - This would clarify how much time consuming it is to unlock weapons modification

Factions

Factions are both interesting; however it is possible that one faction is less chosen than another or that a faction has less experienced players. This can be linked to various things such as the pressure of not running over civilians.

- When entering a district, sometimes there can be a big difference between the numbers of Enforcer/Criminal. It is possible that a faction is weaker than another:
 - Many data points should be checked to make sure that's not the case. For example:
 - Number of active Enforcer & active Criminals
 - Average level of Enforcer and Criminals to see if there is a level gap between factions
 - Percentage of paying users in each faction to know if a faction has an advantage
- Matchmaking for missions is sometimes really long. If a player can't do any missions chances are he'll leave the game.
 - It's important to track mission data
 - How many missions a player does in a session
 - How many enforcer and criminals are present with their different threat levels
 - How many SC, XP etc. were earned
 - Average kills, assists and deaths
 - ...
 - Depending on the result it will be interesting to review
 - Number of missions available
 - How they are selected
 - What the reward are and how they are calculated

Acquisition

In F2P games acquisition features are very important as they greatly lower CPA.

APB lacks features that encourage players to invite other friends. Many different elements could be introduced

- Friend referral
 - Invite friends and get special rewards (the greater the # the greater the reward)
- Increase rewards when playing with friends
- Create a guild system with various benefits / possibilities
- ...


Retention

APB Reloaded is mainly based on PvP mechanics. As a highly competitive game, players can get frustrated more easily than any other type of game. Frustration must be tempered as much as possible through the features.

Design

Current

- New players can be mixed with “Elite” players, going from “nothing” to gold ranked players. As a first experience, being against high-skilled player drives away new players. The current system is based on threat levels; however it does not seem to take into account the players’ rankings.
 - Matchmaking should use Ranking of players. Threat should be used only as second variable to balance the number of player in each team. In the current state, threat alone is not a reliable way to balance teams.



The screenshot shows a mission scoreboard for a game in progress. At the top, a banner reads "MISSION IS CURRENTLY IN PROGRESS" and "The opposition has completed their objective! Now on Stage 2". Below this is a table with columns: MVP, Player Name, Score, Kills, Assists, Deaths, Arrests, Targets, Medals, Cash, Premium, Standing, and Premium. The table is divided into two sections: ENFORCERS (TEAM: 0/2) and CRIMINALS (ENEMY: 0/2). The Enforcers team includes players Biflator, ekinak, and Ivy, all with 0 kills, 0 assists, 0 deaths, 0 arrests, 0 targets, 0 medals, \$0 cash, and 0 premium. The Criminals team includes players TechnoEmo and xxDankWeFXx, both with 250 score, 0 kills, 0 assists, 0 deaths, 0 arrests, 1 target, 0 medals, \$10 cash, and +0 premium. Below the table, there is a section for "SELECTED PLAYER'S DETAILS" for player Ivy, showing a profile icon, rank R 10, a "Whisper" button, an "Ignore" checkbox, and a "STAR 556" weapon. At the bottom, there is a button labeled "UPGRADE NOW".

MVP	Player Name	Score	Kills	Assists	Deaths	Arrests	Targets	Medals	Cash	Premium	Standing	Premium
ENFORCERS TEAM: 0/2												
	Biflator	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	\$0	0		
	ekinak	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	\$0	0		
	Ivy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	\$0	0		
CRIMINALS ENEMY: 0/2												
	TechnoEmo	250	0	0	0	0	1	0	\$10	+0		
	xxDankWeFXx	250	0	0	0	0	1	0	\$10	+0		

SELECTED PLAYER'S DETAILS

Ivy R 10

Whisper

Ignore ☐

STAR 556

PRESS 'TAB' TO TOGGLE SCOREBOARD

UPGRADE NOW

Enforcers' Rating: 36/69/10 vs Criminals' rating: 218 and 93. The gap in experience is huge between the two teams.

- As weapon modifications can give advantages in PVP (higher range, better aim...), the modified weapons from the store can change the outcome of a mission.
 - Players can grind to access weapons that are even better; however before reaching the same level of weapon than the one from the store, it requires a lot of skill and time. The time needed to reach that level might be frustrating for players to reach.
 - Frustration can lead to monetization but also to players leaving the game if it's too hard. It's important to make sure it's properly balanced and track the player base evolution

- Friendly fire is a key feature to the game but many players end up killing their teammates. This can be done both by mistake and on purpose
 - Mistakes are often made during gunfights (sometimes hard to avoid hitting teammates)
 - Players kill their teammates on purpose to keep them from achieving a mission to wait for opposition. In that case players should be able to punish the ally who killed him (similar to counter strike).
 - A punishment system sometimes appears but it's not automatic. How does it work?

New features

Some retention features could be added to encourage players to log back in.

For example daily rewards or special events (must be clearly displayed)

BI

The data on matchmaking would help check if rating level has an impact in the outcome of the mission

- Number of players in each faction
- Ranks and threat of players in each faction
- Outcome of the mission
- ...

We could also check the impact weapon modifications have on missions:

- % of premium weapons in each team
- Damage dealt by premium weapon vs regular weapon
- Outcome of the mission
- Average victory/defeat ratio for players with premium weapons and without
- Checking the number of defeats and composition of teams a player had before leaving the game (never came back) would help understand if there is a link

Friendly fire can sometimes be an issue so tracking it would clarify behaviors

- % kills done by friendly fire
- Friendly fire / rating
- # times a player suffered friendly fire before leaving the game
 - If there is a correlation between drop-off and friendly fire, we could have a "fraternity month" where friendly fire is disabled and see the impact it has

Monetization

Currencies

It is important that the players know exactly what currencies are available in the game and how they can be obtained & used.

The two basic ones are clear

- SC (soft currency) = \$; clearly earned by completing missions
- HC (hard currency) = G1C; can be purchased

However the following can seem confusing

- Joker Tickets: not clearly explained how they can be obtained and what their use is
- Ratings can be perceived by players as a currency given the way it's displayed in the game
 - This is initially very confusing and takes a bit of time to get familiar with it

Levers

Design

Some monetization aspects lack in efficiency while others have been overlooked.

- Players have 2 free slots to create their characters. Since there are only 2 factions and no “class” specialization, player won't feel the need for new character slots.
- Players can boost their progression by purchasing a premium feature but separate boosters for very specific elements could compliment it very well
 - Players who can't quite afford premium may want to purchase boosters and/or players may only want to boost one specific element

BI

The success or not of a monetization feature can easily be tracked. Checking the metrics below would help get more insight on the elements mentioned above and see what monetizes best

- # character / account & faction
 - Do players create more than 1 character? From same faction or opposite faction? Etc.
- % of accounts that purchased additional character slot & average additional slots purchased

Store

The store is a crucial element of F2P games and must be optimized so that players will want to come browse and purchase.

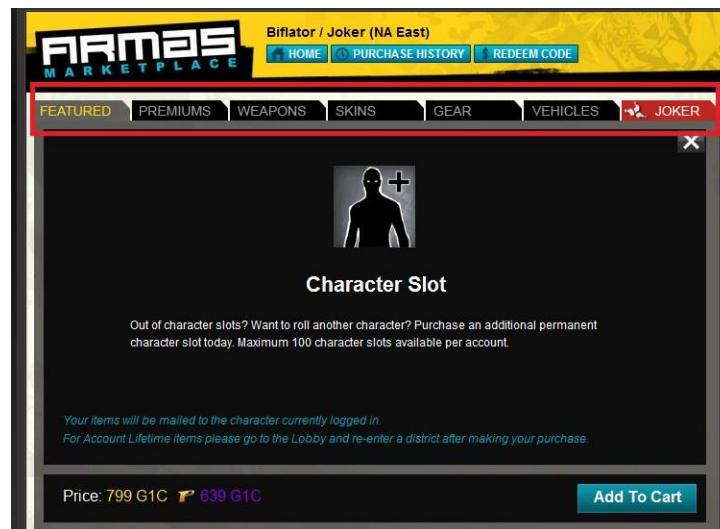
- Players can access the marketplace from many different menus which is perfect; however the visibility isn't the same in every one:
 - For example in the inventory/mail/NPCs etc. the button is large and orange so it stands out but in the main menu it looks exactly like the other options and doesn't stand out at all (see below)
- Players can see their G1C balance but can't purchase G1C from the store
 - Since every purchase goes through G1Cs, it should be extremely easy to purchase them
 - Ex: a really nice and big button that reads "Get G1C"
- When acceding to the store from the game, the store is slightly cropped and there isn't any bar to scroll right and left
 - Players must either navigate by clicking the wheel on the mouse and then move left or right or by increasing the size of the store window.
 - Simply increasing the size of the window from the start should fix this issue
- The store visual aspect is different the first time the player visits it and the other times which can be confusing and disappointing to the players (less aesthetic)
- The store button sometimes appears but doesn't work
 - For example when purchasing ammo at a joker vending machine and clicking marketplace, nothing happens
- The store can be hard to understand to some players since there are different stores (SC & HC)
 - The players could be driven in the store through a tutorial objective. For example, players could be given 150 G1C with the objective to purchase a weapon for 3 days. The remaining amount of G1C would be incentive to purchase extra G1C.
 - As part of the tutorial, player would learn how to spend money and how many advantages he can get for having some premium items.



APB – Marketplace stands out in contact/mail/inventory



APB – Marketplace not visible in main menu



APB - no way to buy G1C packs in the store

Ergonomics

- Some very simple tasks require many clicks and conditions. It might seem unnatural for players to have so many steps when playing a TPS. It should be easier to change items for the character
 - For example to change a weapon, a player must:
 - Be near an NPC (he can't change a same type of weapon anytime)
 - Open inventory
 - Click on the weapon
 - Click on change : open a new menu of weapons
 - Click on the wanted weapons
 - Accept the change
 - In many shooters, players can change their weapons when they're dead in order to counter their enemies' weapons which could be explored in APB
- In the Character Info panel, "Rating" level looks like a currency.
 - "Rating level" should be written under the rating level so that players understand that this is not a currency
- Information is scattered in different panels, players might get confused while looking for simple things such as his amount of cash:
 - Character Info should display the cash of the player
 - Character Info and Inventory should be reunited to gain in comprehension
- Chatting is not natural in game. It is not explained that player should press F9 and chose the channel he wants to chat in.
 - Chat should be explained, or modified in such way that players can easily modify the channel they want to chat in, without requiring them to go through the controls in the menu.
- Mini-map is currently helpful to detect enemies that fire and are near the player. However driving around the map is quite unsure without opening the map with (M).
 - Having the map of the city on the mini-map would greatly smooth the driving for new players. Currently it is hard for new players to find their way on the map quickly which is opposed to the fact that they have little time to complete their objectives during missions.

Other

Character creation

Having many options when it comes to creating characters is great as it helps players “bond” with their character which has a direct impact on retention. However, when using the “Quick Mode” feature it is not clear that the player has to click on “randomize” to take into account the parameters he just selected.

For example in the screenshot below the player selected a dark skin tone, an age and a body type but his character hasn’t changed at all.



APB – Character creation

To clarify this to players a few elements could be explored:

- Changing shape, size and/or position of the “randomize” button
- Changing “randomize” to “generate”

Districts

Several districts are available for the players to explore but it is never explicitly explained what the differences are.

- Players earn reduced rewards (25/50/90%) if they play in a district that is not suited for them. This is never explained in the game.
 - When a player enters a district under or above his level, he should be warned that his rewards are reduced.
- Players should stay, as much as possible, in districts that are in their range of level. Bronze, Silver and Gold players are easily in the same district.

- Since social mechanics are great tools to improve retention, the Join Friends feature should be displayed on the district selection screen.



APB - District selection screen

Groups and teams

- Groups and teams are 2 different things, yet they are very close in their functions. It is confusing for players when they have to differentiate them.
 - Team and Group should be merged to gain in clarity. Groups/Teams should be reserved for players and their friends. When players enter mission with new players they should join the group only the time of the mission.
 - For now a player can be on a team with random players while being in a team with another player which is highly confusing for new players.

Missions

- A mission should start only if there is an opposition. For now, mission starts without opposition which result in missions that a player can finish without having any enemies and a null score.
 - Even if opposition is coming, players have the time to take the first objectives before enemies can organize resistance.
 - If the player carries on his mission, he will have a null score. If he wants to score, he will have to wait furthermore.
 - Some players use friendly fire on purpose to keep their teammates from completing the objectives.
 - There is no way to leave a team until a mission ends, players have to ask the team leader to kick them or have to close the game.

- Missions are composed of objectives. A team has to win all the objectives to complete the mission and win maximum reward. However this system may seem unfair to players that complete 5 objectives out of 6 and have a lesser reward than the other team.
 - Scaling the reward based on objectives completion for the “attacker” and the number of objectives they managed to stop for the “defender” should be a more fair system. However there would still be a bonus reward for the winner of the mission.
- During missions spawn spots are quite far from the action. As the objectives are often limited to 5 minutes, players lose a great amount of time just to go back in action.
 - Putting spawn points closer to action would avoid players to run from spawn points to action for several seconds.

Technical

APB was released in 2010, yet it requires a great configuration to play the game.

- APB requires a lot of RAM and CPU. People with medium computer might have a hard time playing the game even with minimum graphics.
 - APB was tested on a computer that perfectly runs AAA titles (League of Legend, Diablo III, The Secret World)
 - On a data point of view many elements can be analyzed to see if the game runs smoothly
 - Average Ping and FPS
 - # players disconnected due to technical issue
 - % of players playing with different graphical options.
- Even with a good computer, the loading time can exceed 2 minutes which is very long to wait.
 - Optimizing the loading time would prevent players that leave because they wait too long.

Gameplay

- APB is featuring an open world inspired from the GTA series. Therefore, APB could use some of the features of Grand Theft Auto to extend the content in this open world.
 - Races
 - The great diversity of cars, and the open world map could lead to great races between players. It could be declined in such ways weapons are allowed or not.
 - Parkour
 - As the level design proposes many doors/fence/scales, the missions could use some missions inspired from parkour.
- Players that have a high prestige are stigmatised by the game. When a player reach prestige/notoriety level 5, the game puts a bounty on those players. The idea is good, however instead of rewarding those players for their high-level accomplishment, they are quickly punished by the other players.
 - This feature is greatly entertaining; however players get easily killed during their rampage. Easing the access to Prestige 5 would allow players to enjoy more their moment of glory. Currently it is quite hard to go Prestige 5, even when they reach it, they lose it quite fast.
 - Players could have 2 minutes to take advantage of their prestige/notoriety before the bounty is placed on their character

Localization

In some localized versions of APB (such as the Brazilian one) some parts of the game are not translated which can be extremely frustrating for the players.