The Yeti microphone was conceived as the ultimate, state-of-the-art USB microphone, a recording tool that anyone from a casual user to a professional musician could use in almost any recording environment. With the inclusion of three different capsules, users would be able to choose from a variety of recording patterns as well as benefit from such features as gain control and zero-latency headphone output. It had to sound amazing. And of course it had to look . . . *Blue.* In other words, it had to look and perform like nothing else on the market.

Before I even began work on the project, indeed, even before the project had a name, the mic had to be designed. Through a tortuous process of scribbles, sketches and squabbles, Blue's mysterious Design and Engineering Dept. (dubbed "Aria 51") slowly refined the form and function of what was, up to this point, referred to as "USB X" for lack of sufficient inspiration. As its unique look became more defined, it became imperative to give it a proper name.

Unlike other microphone companies, Blue has always refused to follow accepted convention by naming its products after a series of seemingly random letters and numbers. Instead of the C110-EX, we had

The Blue Microphones Family

the Cactus. We eschewed the DT5000 Series in favor of the Dragonfly, the Mouse and the Kiwi. We named a universal shockmount (a device that suspends the mic and dampens surrounding vibrations) with the sublime moniker of "Ralph the Wonder Mount." It sold very well.

Naming sessions usually include a group of people in a small, barely air conditioned room with a whiteboard on the wall and too many cups of coffee. Ideas are brought forth and dutifully recorded. Or ignored. Going off on tangents is not uncommon, as are names that would not be acceptable in most churches, but eventually a few names stick and a consensus is reached. The Yeti was born of this process. To this day I don't know who thought of the name — it was one of hundreds (ok, at least fifty) written down and only later, after review, did it strike people as uniquely fitting the shape of the mic.

Now that we had a name and a pretty good idea of the look of the mic, the creative process for the packaging could begin. Aside from conveying to the consumer the immediate, "What is this product and what does it do," I felt that the overall theme of the artwork had to emphasize a friendly, personable approach. The Yeti is a physically large mic with a tremendous amount of features. Lots of knobs. Lots of options. Something like this could easily intimidate consumers, so like the Yeti of lore, we needed to be warm and fuzzy. I hit upon the idea of creating a family of Yeti (Yetis?) that would make the user more at home and comfortable exploring all of the amazing things the Yeti can do.

I began by researching Yeti mythology and how the character had been visually interpreted. (Note to readers: I don't believe the Yeti really exists. Sorry. I think it's the mistaken identity of the endangered Himalayan Brown Bear, which is prone to walking at times on its hind legs. Go figure.) Illustrated versions of the Yeti abound, from outright scary to cuddly-adorable. Some

Preliminary Yeti Sketches

are well known: the Gama-Go Yeti is particularly well designed and appears on everything from shirts to vinyl toys. I compiled as many Yeti images as possible in order to not (ahem) ape other existing Yeti.

It was now time to sketch.

Amazing as it may seem in this digital age, I began with a pencil and a piece of paper, something no mouse or electronic tablet has been able to improve upon. I started with what I call the "Basic" Yeti, a somewhat bemused, friendly fellow that you could bring home to mom. It took quite a few sketches to hone him into what I saw in my mind to begin with, but he eventually took shape and I scanned a rough sketch into the computer. While I was sketching him out, other, more specialized Yeti began to form in my mind; these too would be sketched out and digitized one by one.

With the Yeti now safely caged on my desktop, I simplified the shape of the Yeti with a series of basic shapes, mostly comprised of circles, ovals and simple lineforms. All of this was done in outline (wireframe) view. Much time was spent refining and combining shapes until I had what I wanted, and along the way I stumbled upon other shapes and patterns that would eventually work their way into the other Yeti family members. It's a mostly intuitive process that I wish I could explain in words, which I'd do if I could only spell, so it'll have to remain a mystery.
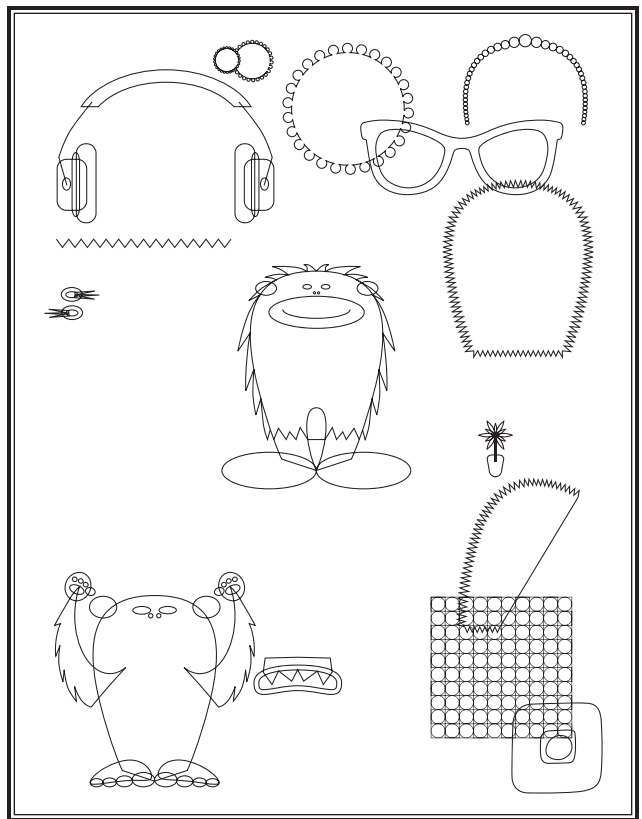

Yeti Outlines

At this point, with a few of the Yeti drawn in outline form, it was time to turn attention to the actual package. Blue's wonderful idiosyncratic approach to things is to develop a unique look for its products, from the actual design of the mics all the way down to their packaging. Thus, no two Blue packages have the same look; aside from the Blue logo and a blue-colored band running around the packages, there is no uniform series design look. This approach does have its occasional drawbacks, but remains true to one of Blue's founding principals, that every person has their own unique individual style and sound.

Pennsylvania

Part of that critical identity to this or any other Blue product was to devise a strong typographic quality to enhance the brand. Choosing the right fonts is crucial to any project, and the process of spending hours reviewing different typefaces is, well, dare I say it, fun (perhaps that's why many designers are single). Fonts are the visual equivalent of a box of assorted chocolates: sweet, immediate, and a bit of a treasure hunt. It's simply a matter of weeding through all the bad ones and finding the gems. There are a lot of typefaces out there and 90% of them are badly designed or won't withstand the winds of time and vagaries of style. And no two designers will agree on the remaining 10%, prompting heated discussions at parties – ultimately another reason why most designers are still single.

The font chosen for the Yeti was the Pennsylvania font family, designed by the Font Bureau in Boston. I was drawn to it by the variety of weights within the family and the way some of the lower case letters evoked a figure walking upright, which was too nice a visual metaphor to pass up. I went with a lower case spelling of Yeti on the front of the box, as it was a visually friendlier way of introducing the product. Capitalizing it was far too formal for a first date with the consumer.
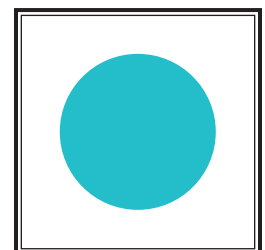

PMS 7466

Next up: color. Yeti follows in the tradition of other recent Blue consumer product names with an arctic-like theme: Snowball, Snowflake, Icicle (we like to think of it as our way of combating global warming). Anyhow, these products pretty much cornered the market in the blue color spectrum, so I gravitated towards a cousin color, teal. Aqua, if you

prefer. Leafing through a booklet of Pantone Colors (specialized printing inks that are created from precise amounts of specific colors) I found a beautiful shade of light aqua-teal that reminded me of light reflected through glacial ice, which may someday join the Yeti in the annals of legendary sights.

Working with James Chan, our extremely talented and diabolical Product Designer, we were able to determine the package size and shape – in this case an exciting rectangle. As with the Yeti characters, I began sketching out the box layout by hand. I knew I wanted a large image of the mic on the front cover and we needed to have a simple way to convey all of the mic's features on the back. I envisioned the Yeti characters inhabiting one panel and some sort of chart showing the various applications the mic was suited for. But actually putting this all together is another matter entirely. Approaching something like this is a bit akin to sailing off into uncharted waters and hoping your gallantly designed ship doesn't sail off the edge of the box. This is a messy period where potential visual ideas butt up against the harsh realities of available space, the needs of other departments within the company (everyone has their 2¢ on the ideal layout) and the pure artistic vision residing in my head. It's all a bit nerve-wracking, albeit in a slow motion sense, as the process takes, well, *forever*. Blue prides itself on creating everything in-house: print and web design, illustration, copy writing and production are all housed under one roof. Our amazing Senior Designer, Ben
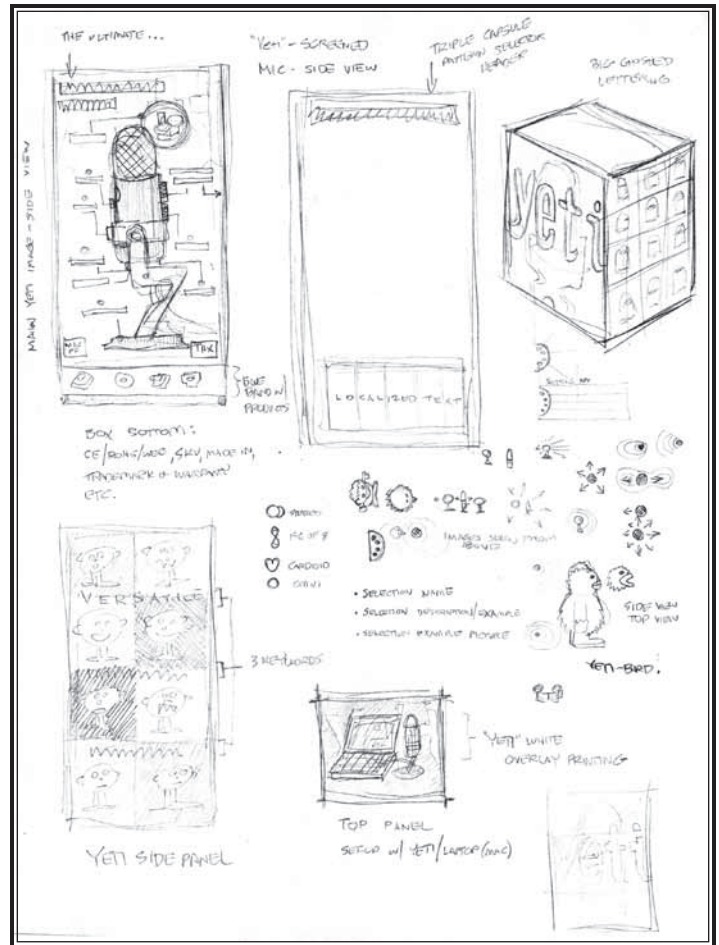
Early Package Sketches

Front Panel Evolution

Bain, is not only responsible for much of Blue's creative output, but also coordinates the Blue Creative Staff and makes sure they never leave the premises (not that they'd get past the alligator-infested moat anyway).

During this time the actual Yeti mic was still going through the first rounds of preproduction, so at first all I had to work with were 3-D CAD drawings as placeholders for real pictures of the mic. The first, primitive rough for the front cover sported a teal background with the name Yeti reversed out. As you can see below, the mic at this point was still evolving, and had not shed its juvenile coat of black. Not happy with the teal background, I reversed everything and went with white, which looked far more refreshing. The back panel, showing a side view of the Yeti, had the beginnings of the type design in place, but there was still a ways to go.

Over the next few months the package evolved. I fleshed out and added more Yeti characters and geared them towards representing different archetype users: Rocker Yeti, Businessman Yeti, Out-in-the-field Yeti, Techie Yeti, and so on. The Raging Yeti is based on someone who actually works at Blue. The Techie Yeti's glasses are modeled after Buddy Holly. It's quite the family tree. Originally each Yeti had their own groovy background pattern, but this ultimately proved too distracting and was jettisoned in favor of just solid colors.

Text was finalized, laid out, moved around, positioned, and then moved again. In order to satisfy the requirements to let Yeti loose in Canada, all the text in the box had to be bilingual – English/French. This adds another layer of complexity and guarantees even more reshuffling of blocks of text. The chart describing the recording modes was laid out, and in the continuing effort to be more user-friendly, the Yeti characters were again brought out to illustrate

each salient application. Owing to space limitations, I decided to move the block of localized languages (bullet points describing the mic's features in five languages – a necessary evil if we are to achieve true global domination) to the Yeti characters side, which had the unpleasant effect of making a less than desirable aspect ratio for each figure. I decided to remedy this by adding a section in the middle with some more humorous/descriptive text, hitting upon the concept of a dictionary definition, since some people (I won't name names) had no idea what a Yeti was. Bigfoot yes, Yeti, no. And what are those Himalayan things you're referring to?

Up until this point I had been employing placeholder images of the mic that I shot in a primitive little studio in my garage at home, but I was finally able to get an actual production model of the mic for professional photography. One photo session and some Photoshop touch ups later, and I had more photos in my possession than any Yeti tracker on the planet. Final pictures were dropped in, last-second tweaks taken care of, and the package was sent to the printer. Fingers crossed, digital proofs were approved and a small run of preproduction boxes were printed and ultimately approved. We had a package!

Then there's the Yeti manual. But that's another story.

All in all, the process to bring the Yeti packaging to life, from initial sketches to final finished artwork, took about two and a half months and untold man-hours. I think it was worth it. The packaging has been quite successful, sales are through the roof and the Yeti characters now grace T-shirts, beer coasters, stickers and anything else we can think of. I suppose the fact that the microphone looks and sounds amazing may have something to do with it, but I prefer to think that people are purchasing it in order to frame the packaging on their living room wall. I mean, that's what *I* did.

The Final Yeti Lineup

Fig 8. *The Complete Package, Ready to be Released Into the Wild*