



Case Study – Microsoft Redesigning Microsoft's casual gaming web app

My Role

Senior Product Designer



Context

Microsoft Zone, also known as MSN Games, is a casual gaming web app with a loyal user base who have been playing for decades.

Problems

Outdated visual design

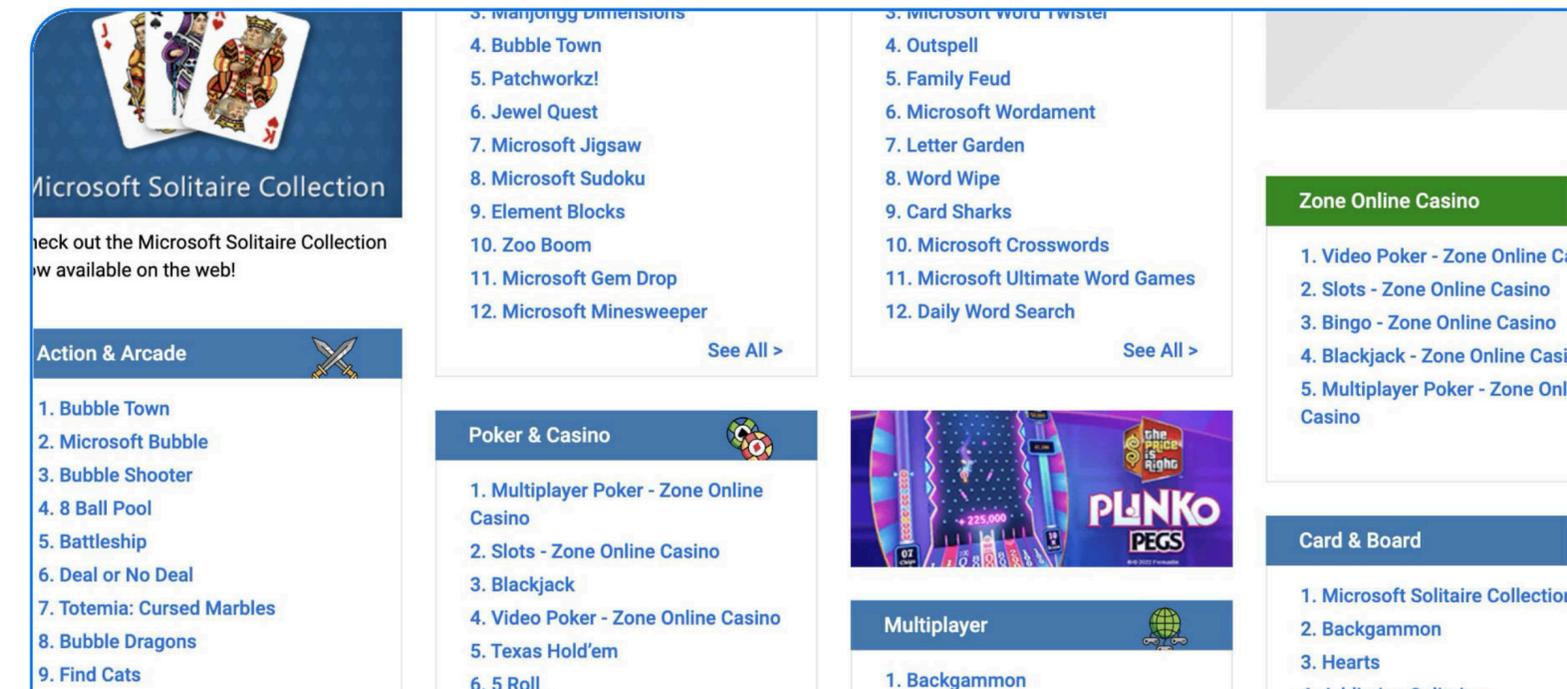
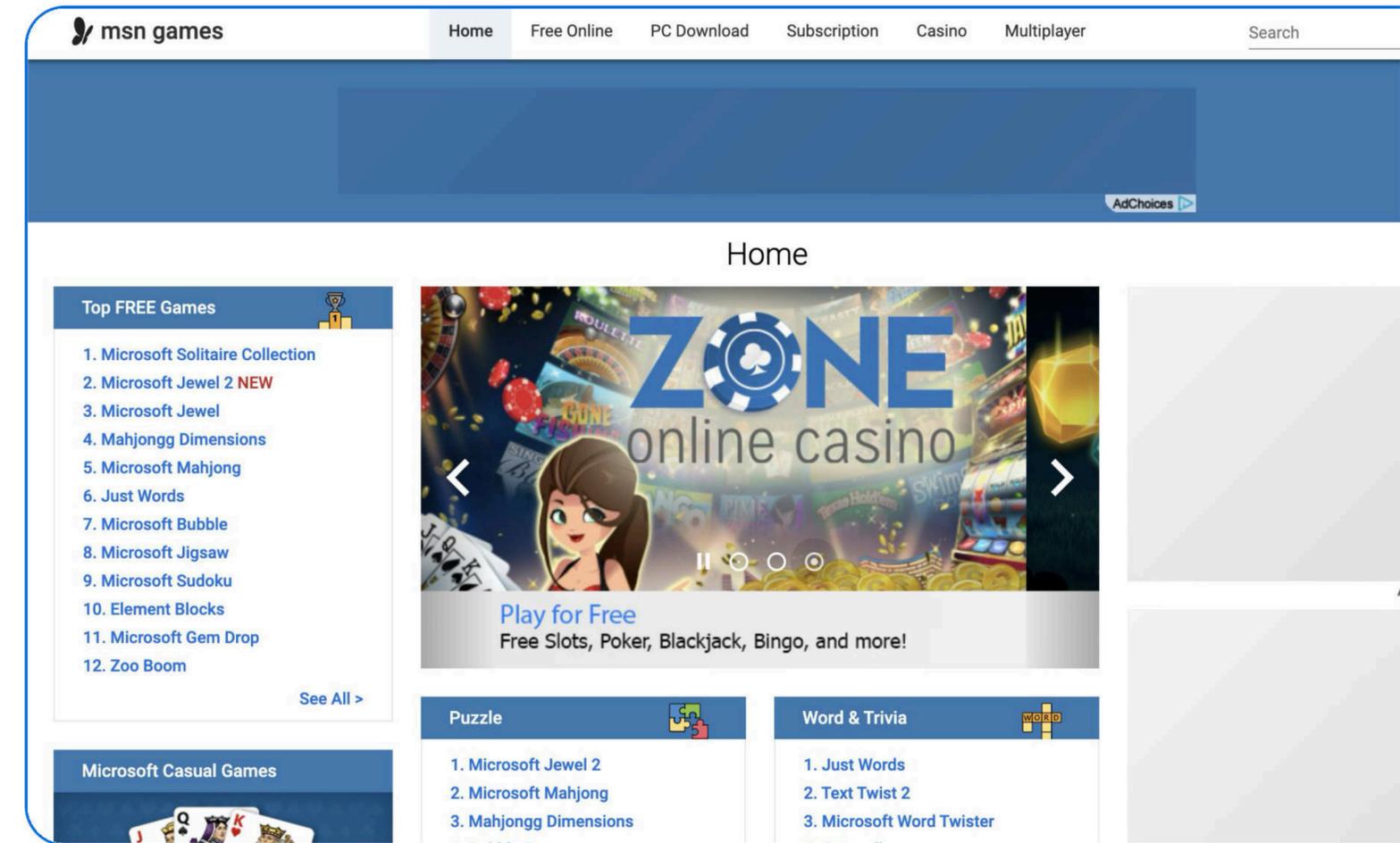
Lack of brand personality, felt corporate rather than playful or welcoming.

Poor Engagement

Game discovery relied on text-heavy lists with no previews.

High new user bounce rate

New users rarely play a game after landing on the homepage.



Goals

Enhance the website's visual design

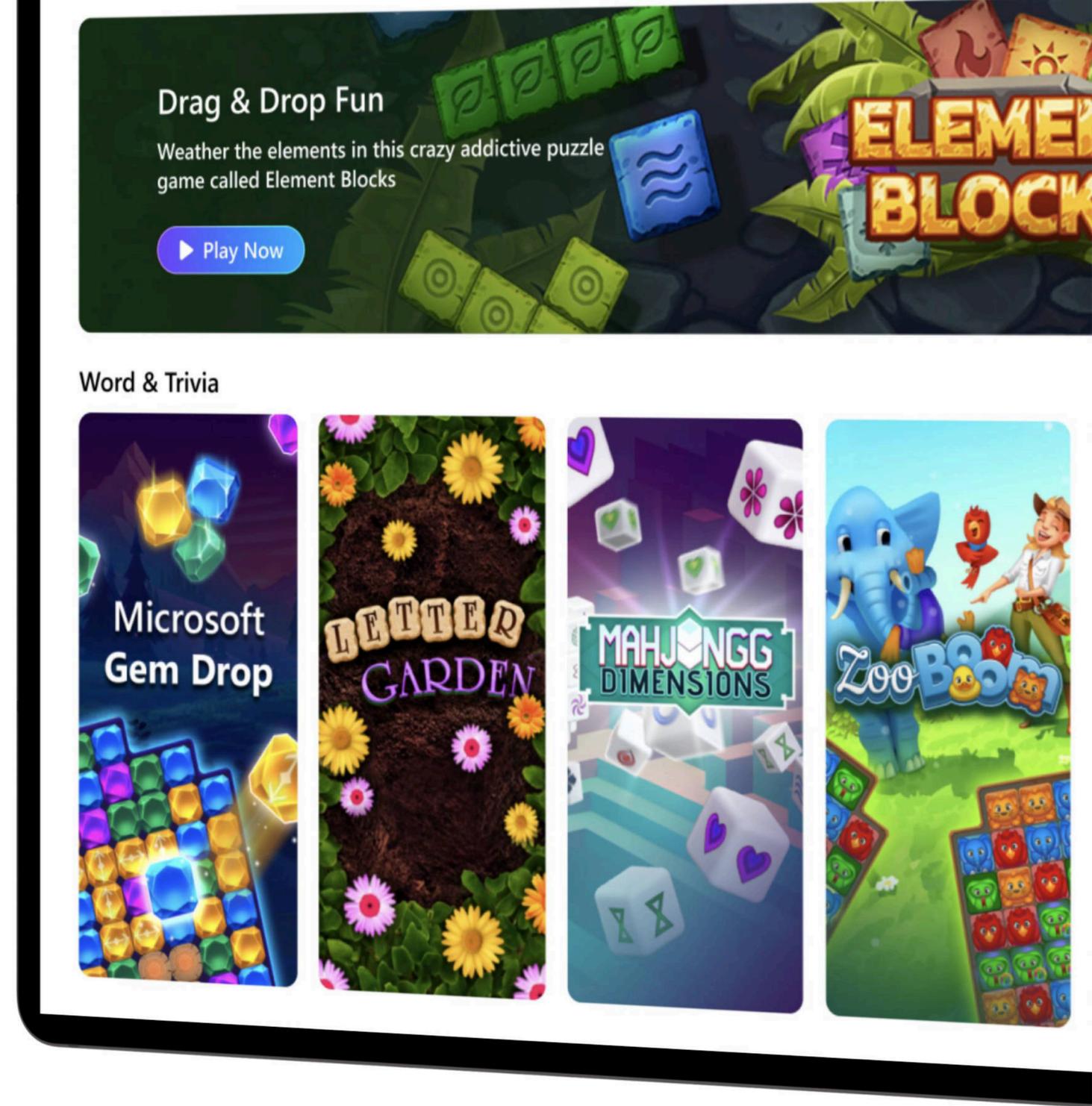
An enticing website that is aligned with industry design trends

Improve discoverability

Engaging navigation that guides users to discover games

Decrease bounce rate of new users

Business goal: Attract and engage new users on Zone



My Responsibilities

Started off as one of the designers – ended up with Full ownership of the redesign.

I led sessions with a range of subject-matter experts for strategy alignment and holistic problem solving, this included leadership, marketing, engineers, PMs and game development professionals.

I conducted user research, rebranding, building a design system, user testing with prototypes and collaborating with engineering.

My Process

Design thinking, a user-centered iterative approach



Understand

Conducted user interviews
and market analysis



Define

Analyzed findings
and identified
goals



Ideate

Explored design
possibilities



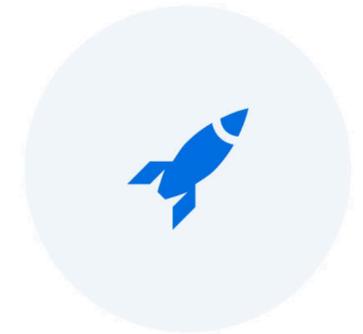
Prototype

Created working
prototypes



Test

Got feedback and
iterated designs



Implement

Implemented the
solution

Deviating from my process...

I typically start with user research to inform design strategy, however, upon joining, leadership asked me to quickly evaluate designs that were previously created by an external agency.

Market Research

Competitor SWOT analysis to identify market standards, user expectations and uncover opportunities for differentiation.

Images for Games

Visual promotion of the games with colorful and exciting images, rather than Zone's text list of games

Colorful and exciting UI

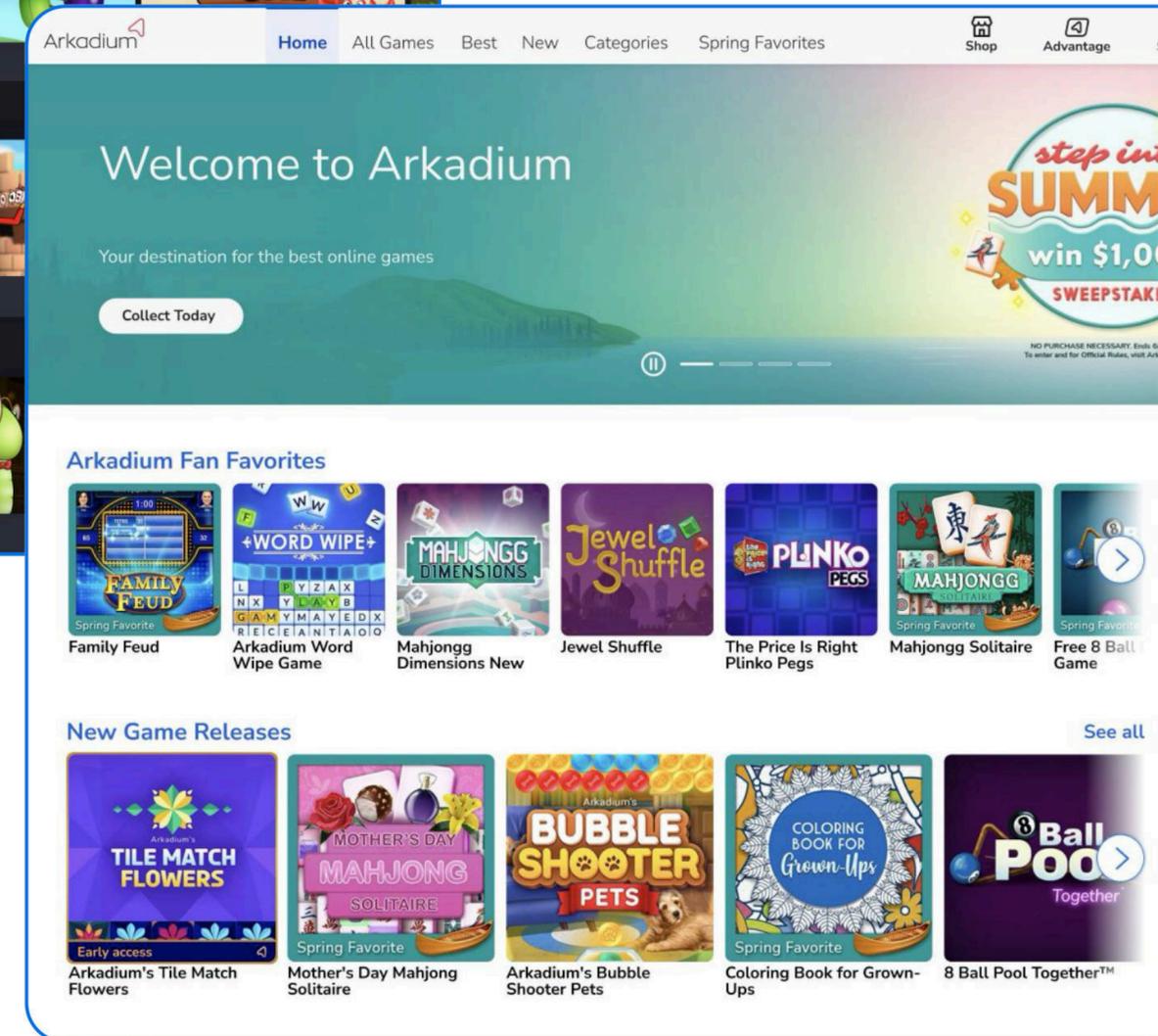
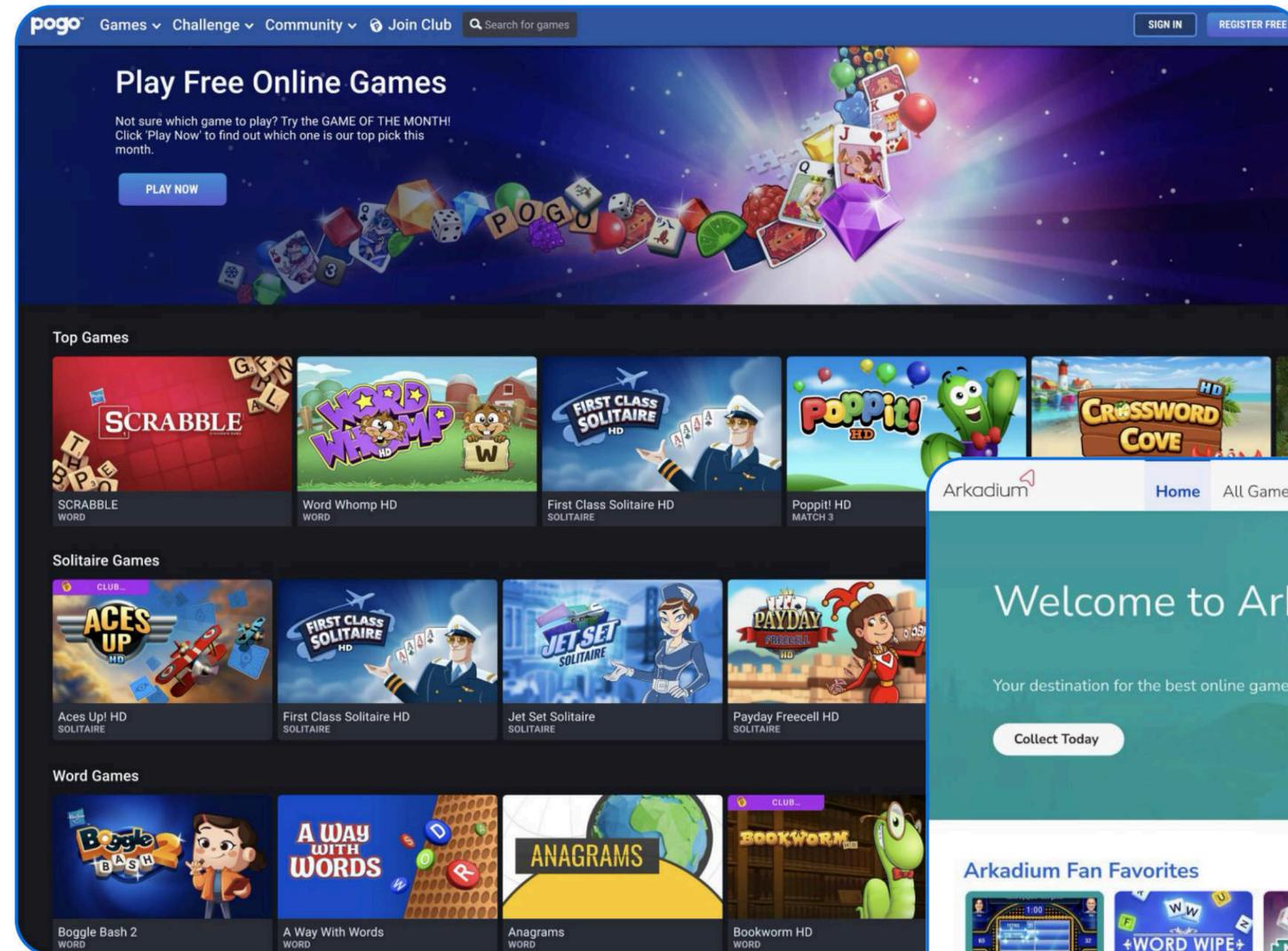
Gaming website trend of using bright colors to entice users to play games

Clean layout

Organized content with category carousels and white space to display games without overwhelming users

Hero section

Promoting games at the top with large images and short descriptions



Evaluating and Elevating Design Work

I was asked to provide feedback for initial designs delivered prior to my involvement

My Key Evaluations

Technical Feasibility

Complex hero design required unsustainable graphic and site updates for all 150 games

Business Risk

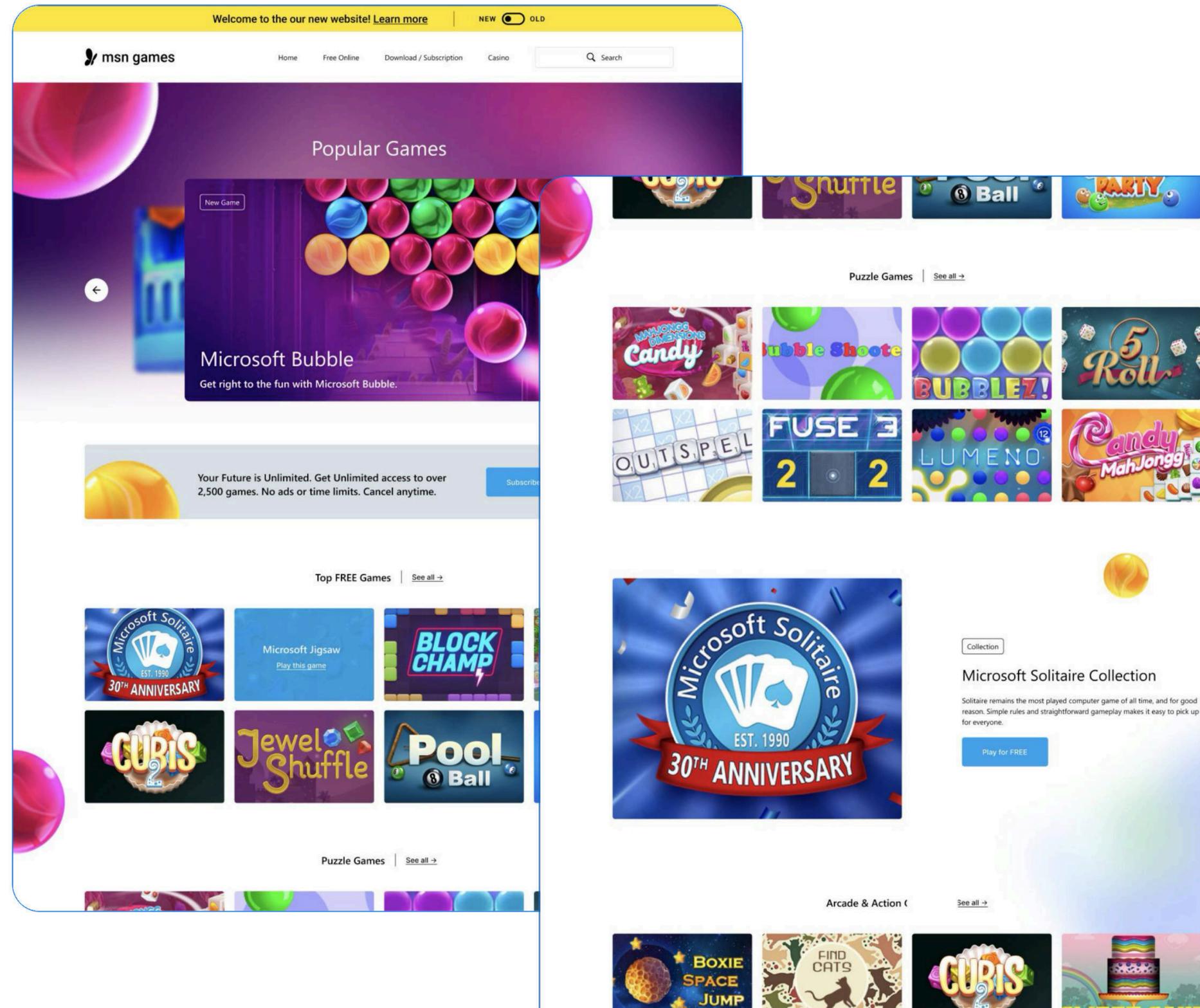
Ads weren't visible without scrolling, impacting revenue

Failure to meet Accessibility standards

Failed to meet contrast ratios, text size, and branding accessibility that Microsoft must abide by

Layout inefficiency

Excessive spacing limits how much content can be promoted above the fold, impacting discoverability



Design Leadership

I lead half a dozen design critiques that shifted the direction toward more technically feasible, accessible, and business-aligned solutions. These meetings included the leadership team, PMs, engineers, game developers and marketing.

After presenting my evaluations to stakeholders, I was appointed as the sole designer with full ownership of the product.

Advocating for Users

I secured support to invest time and resources for user interviews—ensuring design decisions were grounded by real user insights.

What do casual gamers think of Zone?

Zone lacked up-to-date insights into user needs and pain points, so I strongly advocated for 15 user interviews with casual gamers and zone users to better understand their perspectives.

Key Takeaways

Zone is Cramped, Dated and Dull

Users dislike Zone's outdated and boring design, dull color scheme and lack of images. They feel the text-heavy interface makes the site feel cramped and cluttered.

60% of users want to discover new games but find it difficult

The majority of Zone users want to discover new games but are not enticed to do so on Zone. Users mentioned the text lists do not motivate them to try new games compared to the vibrant colorful images on competitor sites.

Zone is not engaging or interesting

All users, but especially new users, felt Zone does not attract them at a first glance. They mention competitors offer a more visually exciting appearance experience with images and clean layout that's easier to sift through.

Business Considerations from Stakeholder Interviews

To understand company strategy and business goals for the project, I held meetings with the department leadership. This gave stakeholders the opportunity to express business needs and concerns.

Maintain Ad revenue streams

Even though Ads are frustrating for users, it is the revenue generating stream. I will incorporate it into the design in a way that satisfies both stakeholders and users.

“Microsoft is blue” and rated E for everyone

Any visual design improvements must align with the larger company brand and audience standards.

Accessibility Standards

Microsoft follows WCAG accessibility to a high standard. The design must be inclusive and compliant with global inclusivity regulations.

User Research

Considering findings from all of the research below, I synthesized the data collected using Affinity Mapping to identify emerging themes and prioritize them based on user wants and pain points.

- 15 User interviews
- SWOT Competitor Analysis
- Stakeholder interviews

Emerging Themes

Outdated visual design

Solution: Create a design that is exciting, modern and aesthetically pleasing

Poor game discovery

Solution: Use colorful images to grab attention and a layout that guides user to explore the site

Lack of engagement = high bounce rate

Solution: Recommend and promote games to users. Introduce movement

Define Goals

Presented insights to Stakeholders, PM and engineers. We identified project goals that align with user feedback and business goals, listed below:

Enhance visual design

Redesign the website to be more enticing, visually appealing and in-line with industry design trends

Improve discoverability

Seamless navigation and engagement features that encourage users to discover games

Decrease bounce rate of new users

Business goal: Attract and engage new users on Zone by improving first impressions and engaging their interest

Branding & Style

Create a visual language that's modern, colorful and exciting, fit for a gaming website

Had meetings with branding & marketing to discuss company brand guidelines & accessibility

Color Palette: Bright colors with a vibrant blue-purple gradient as the primary

Purple evokes creativity and innovation in gaming, giving Zone a modern and culturally relevant edge.

BEFORE



Muted and dull



AFTER



Exciting and fun



Accessibility: WCAG regulations. Contrast ratios must be at AAA level, text size minimum of 16

Contrast Ratios for text against opaque colors



Text to accompany icons



Branding & Style

Variety of Game Tiles

I created 4 images for all 150 games on the site. They are colorful and exciting with differing aspect ratios to maintain interest.



Components: Increased corner radius and shadow accents for a modern-look, replacing outdated straight-edged style

BEFORE

AFTER



Sharp corners

Softer radius

Design System

Modular components for scalability and consistency across devices.

Buttons

Default: See All Games, Surprise Me!

Hover: See All Games, Surprise Me!

Pressed: See All Games, Surprise Me!

Play Now, Surprise Me!

Icons: Play Now, Surprise Me!

Pagination Icons: Play Now, Surprise Me!

Color Palette

Category	Color	Hex	Opacity
Primary	Default	#7443FF	
	Hover	#5418FF	
Secondary	Default	#722727	70% Opacity
	Hover	#454545	
Primary	Pressed	#2E1866	
	Pressed	#004666	
Secondary	Default	#000000	
	Pressed	#000000	60% Opacity

Drop Shadows

Drop Shadow	Hex	Opacity	Blur	X	Y
Drop Shadow 1 Carousel Arrows	#000000	25%	10	0	2
Drop Shadow 2 See More Games Button	#000000	100%	20	0	0

Large Carousel

Small Carousel

Portrait Carousel

Hero

Promo

Mobile Hero

Mobile Pro...

Buttons

Te...

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Large...

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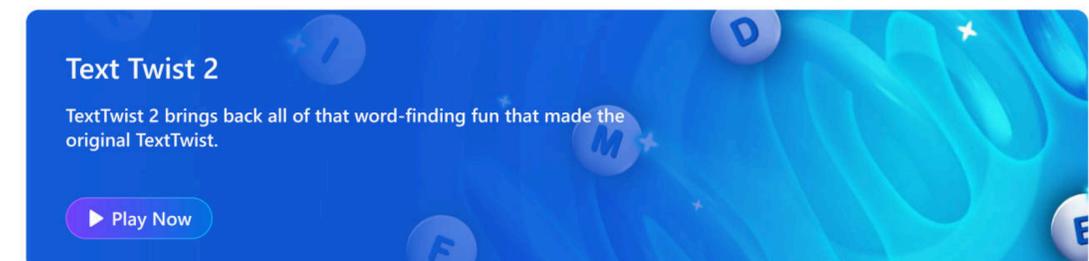
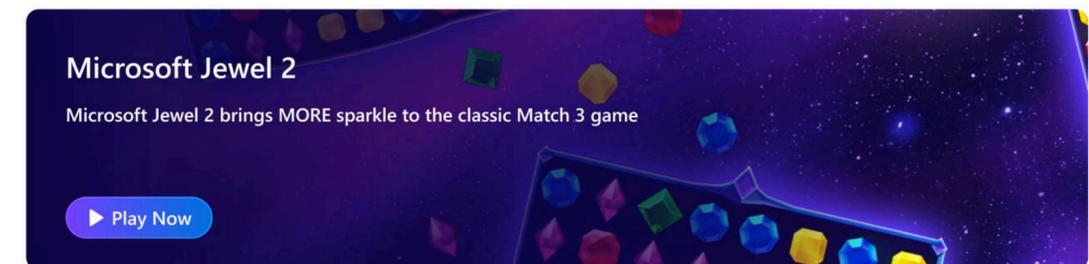
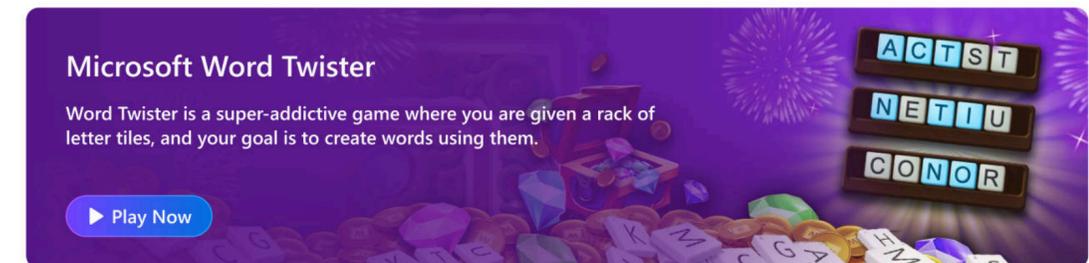
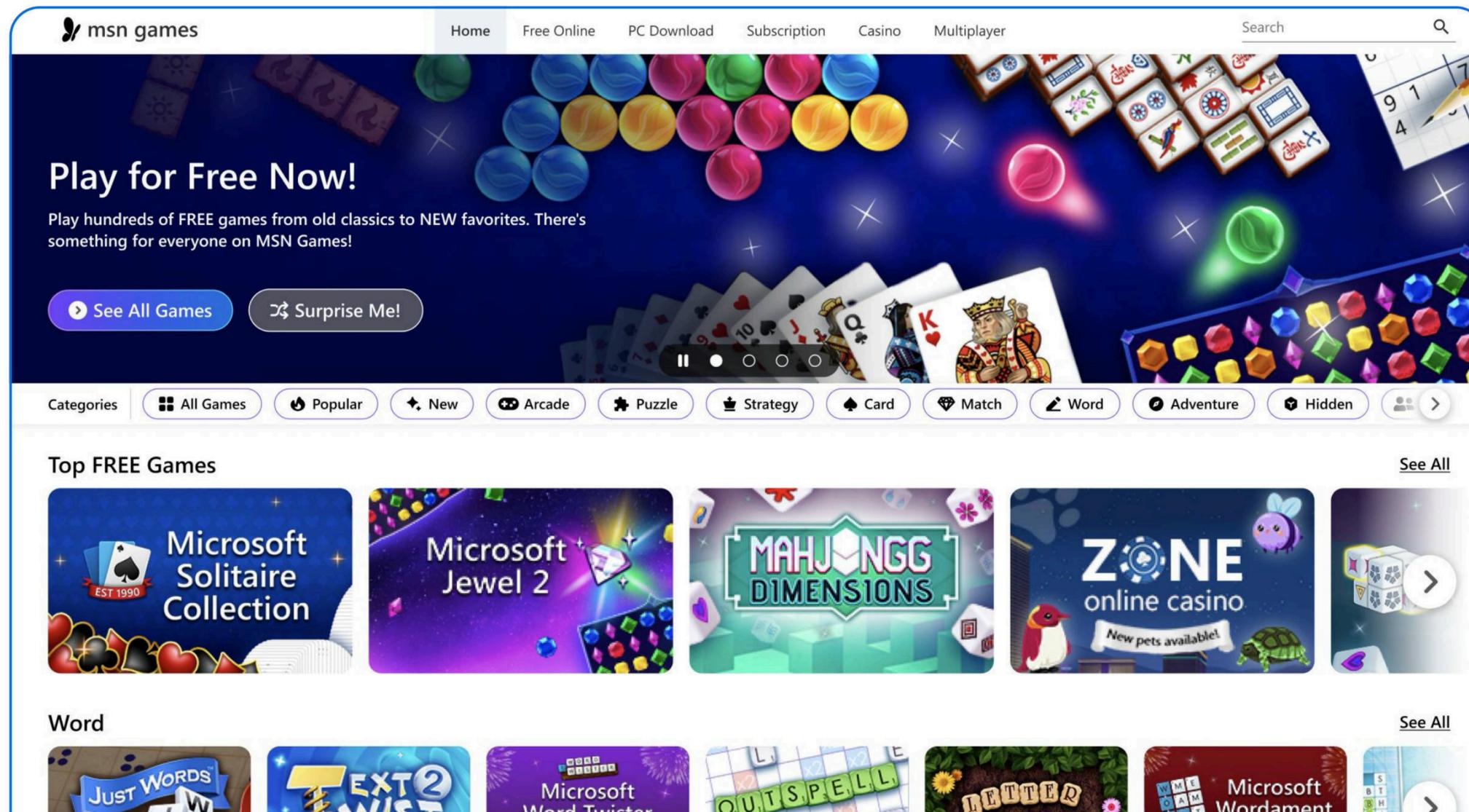
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Hero Banner

Engaging Users with movement & game recommendations at first glance

Auto-Rotating highlight carousel that communicates Zone's value proposition. Remaining slides promote trending and new games to subtly guiding users towards discovery. Dynamic movement captures attention and makes the site feel more lively. Strong call-to-action buttons encourage users to play.



Carousel Layout

Aligns with how users naturally browse and engage with lightweight entertainment content.

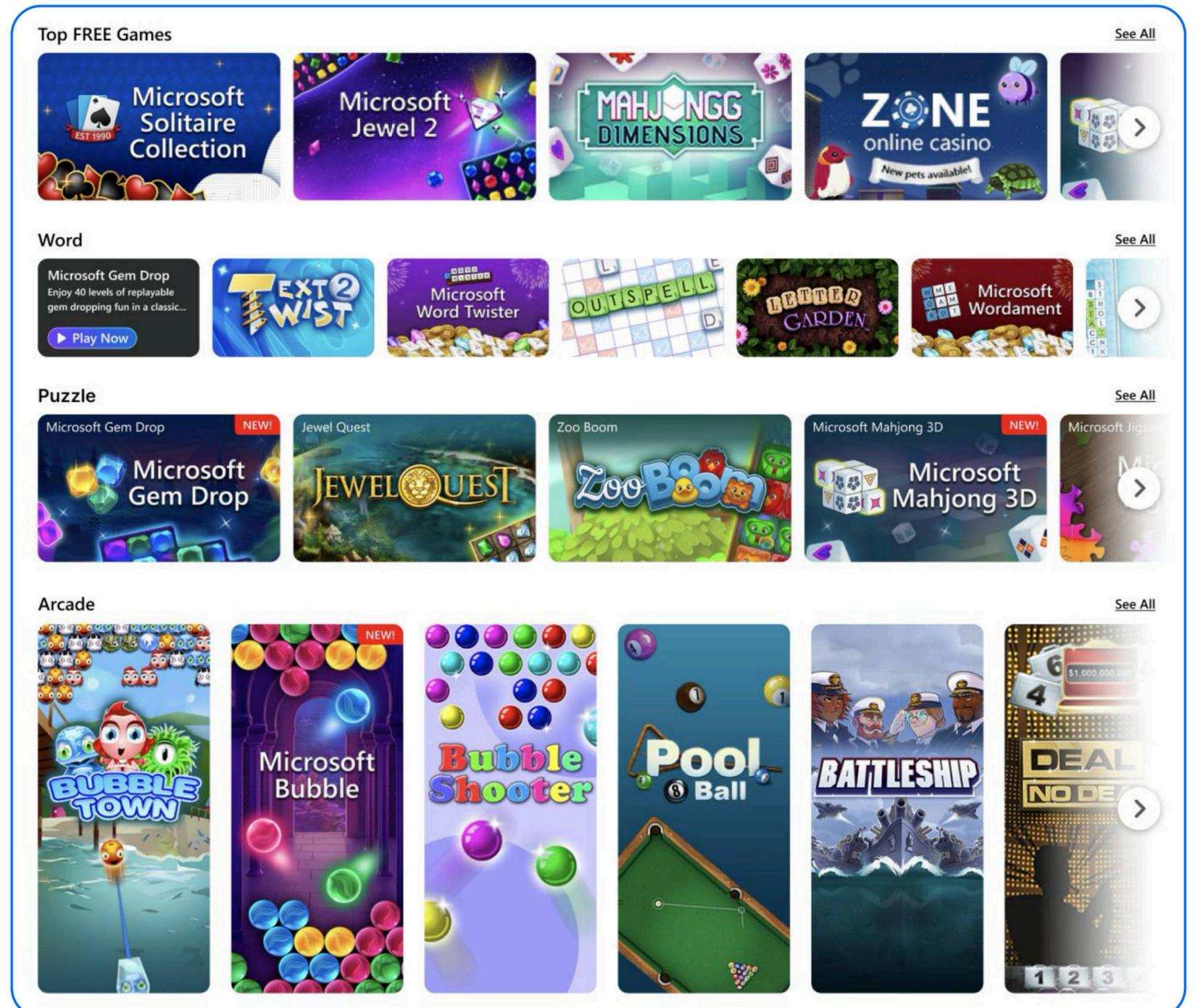
 **Intuitive Browsing:** Horizontal exploration mimics streaming services and app stores. Swiping is a natural gesture on mobile devices

 **Engaging Experience:** Motion and interaction (hover, swiping gesture) creates a dynamic and game-like feel, drawing users deeper into the site. Enjoy at a glance: Lets users quickly scan multiple games without overwhelming them

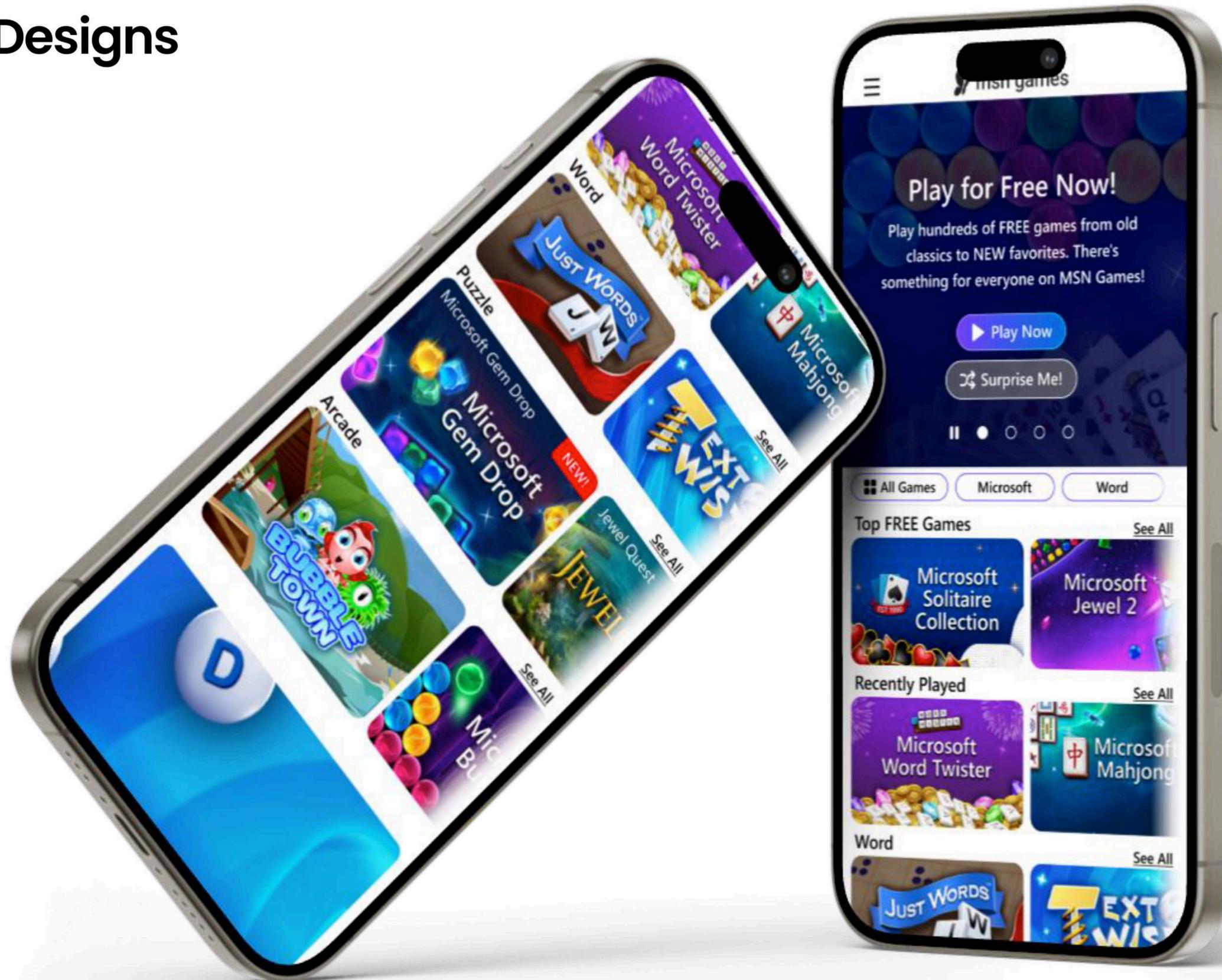
 **Clean Visual Hierarchy:** Keeps the layout minimal and focused, surfacing a few games at a time, which avoids visual clutter. Organizes content by category and popularity, giving the interface structure and making it easy to digest.

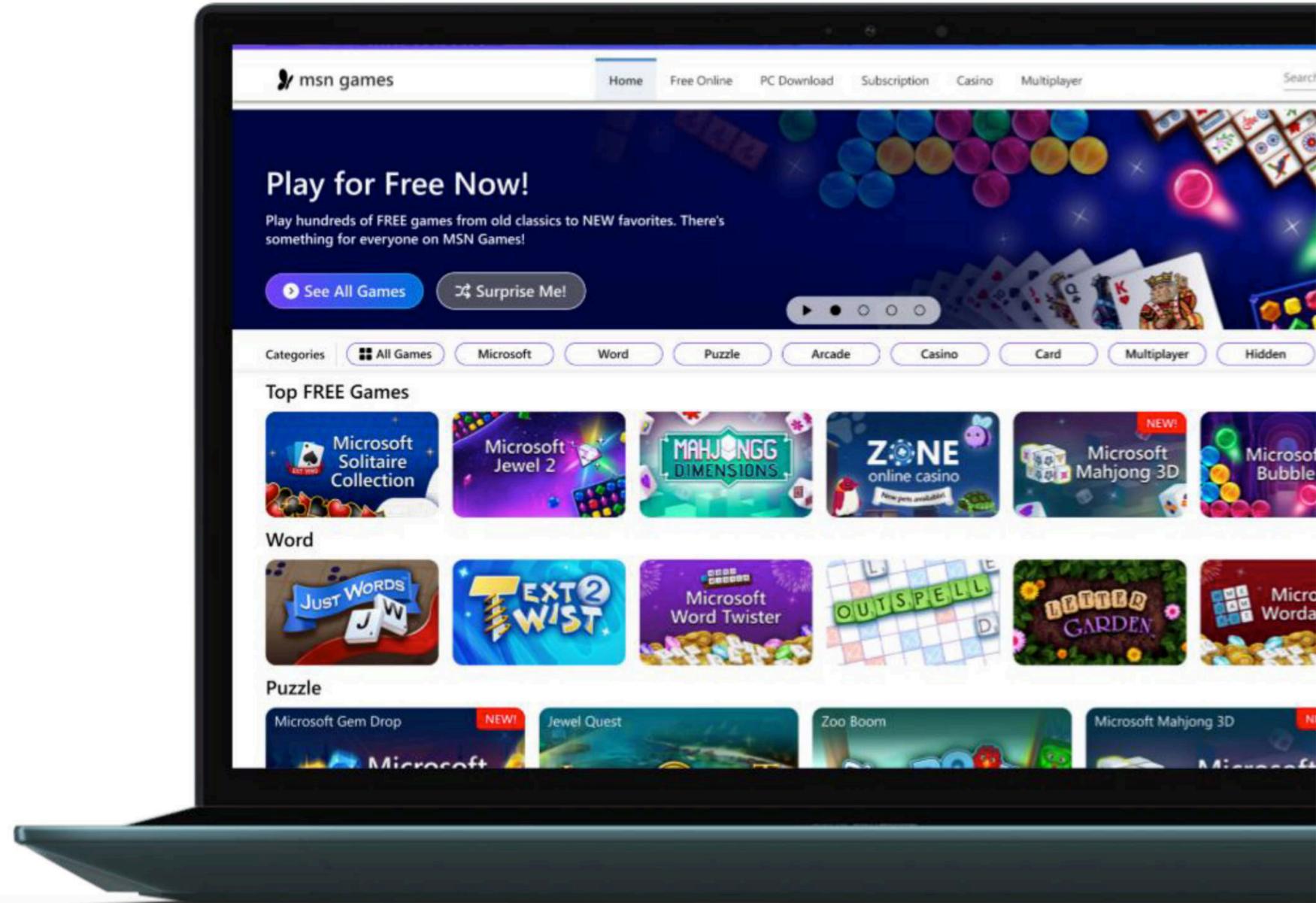
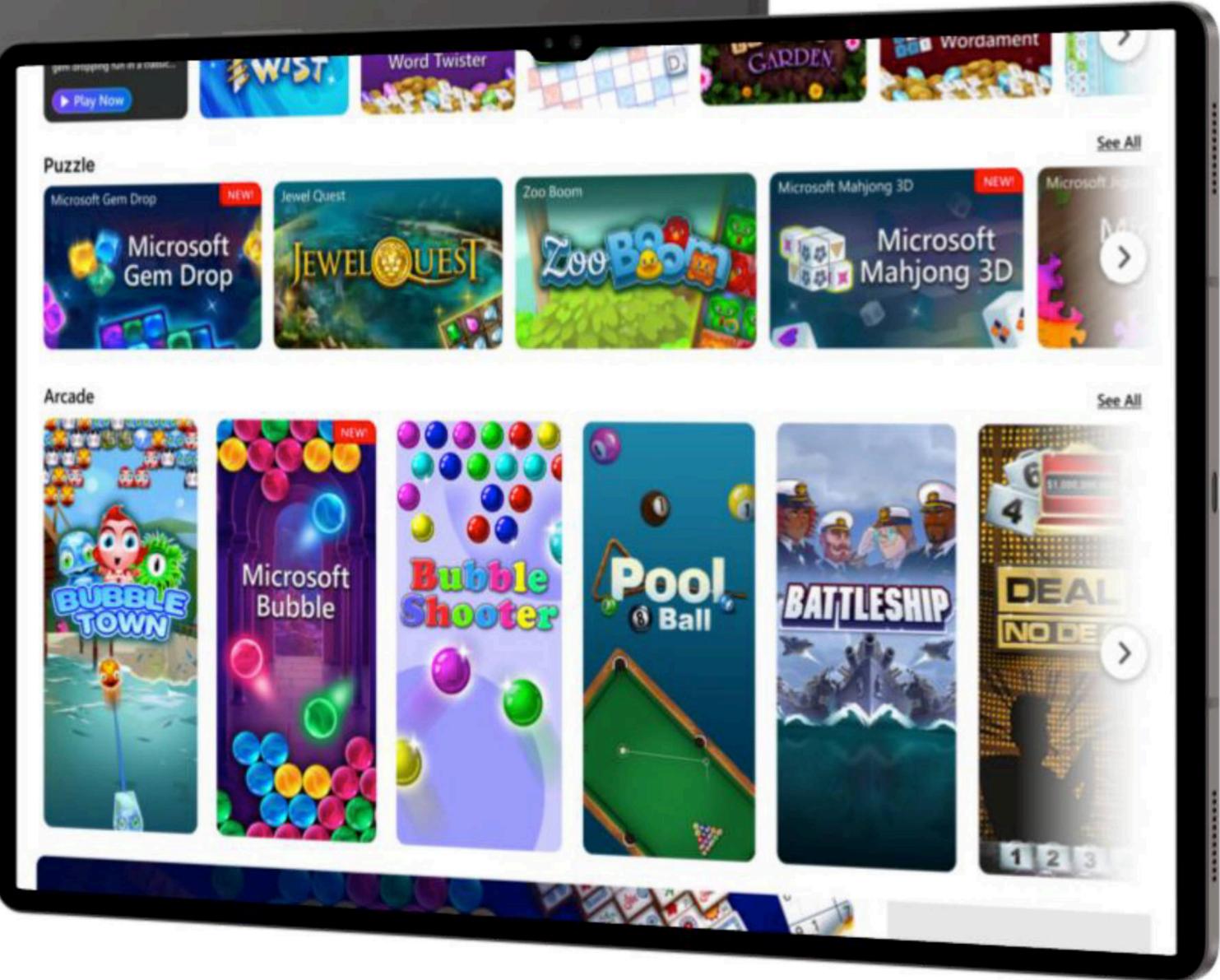
Casual Gaming industry:

- Casual gamers often browse leisurely, a carousel surfaces suggestions without pressure.
- It allows for personalized or curated highlights (e.g. trending, new releases), subtly guiding users toward discovery.



Final Designs





User Feedback

Comparative Interviews: Old VS New design

80% of Zone users preferred the New Homepage!

- **Visually Appealing Images and exciting design.** Users expressed that the images, vibrancy of colors and overall design was more gamey, enjoyable and full of life. It enticed them to explore new games and stay on the site longer.
- **Intuitive Usability & Organized layout** with categories to help locate similar games
- **Lack of ads:** There were just as many ads on both! But it was more strategically placed on new homepage so they wouldn't be bothered by them as much
- **Images make it easier to sift through** content and they provide more information about games at a glance, which aids in their locating new or favorite games.
- **Better navigation experience.** Large text size is easier to read and visual cues make the information easier to absorb than tiny text lists

Results

Business Impact

30% decrease in new user bounce rate. Met initial business goal!

Modern and Visually appealing design

Improved discoverability and engagement

Positive feedback from Stakeholders and users

Company-wide Design Impact

Created Design System which optimized developer workflows

Advocated importance for User Data & User Research