



MARKETING IN GAME DESIGN

Emilia Nurminen

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Interactive Media Studies

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ABSTRACT

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In my thesis, Marketing in Game Design, I wanted to inspect how developing a game from a purely commercial perspective affects on the game design. The purpose of this thesis is to define the valid aspects of product marketing for games, how they are perceived in game industry and how those aspects affect to the game design. The question I am asking is how to make marketing a fluent part of indie game development process. Through my thesis project, Puzzleplatform, I study how the marketing aspects affect the game concept itself and how these aspects can be implemented in the game concept.

Key words: marketing, game development, game design, game marketing

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1 INTRODUCTION

Marketing is more than merely advertising and selling products. As Blythe defines marketing, it is considered as communication between the company and its customers (Blythe 2008, 2) to raise the awareness of the product among consumers to gain more customers and more revenues. Therefore it is imperative to consider the marketing from the very beginning of the product development. In ideal circumstances, marketing and product development lives side by side and they complete each others.



PICTURE 1: Disneyland caters Disney's IPs as services (source: bopandtigerbeat.com).

Marketing entertainment differs a bit from marketing products and services. As Al Lieberman points out marketing strategies of products and services are concentrated on the needs that those products and services fulfill, marketing strategies for the entertainment concentrates on the experience of product (Lieberman-Esgate 2003, 7) to create need to buy and consume it. Entertainment products are also most of the times immaterial properties (IPs) rather than physical products and services, but while being mere IPs, they can be harnessed as physical products and services to expand the experience of the entertainment product.

According to Lieberman there are 4 critical aspects to consider when thinking the marketing strategy for entertainment product (Lieberman – Esgate 2003, 2);

- 1) **Content**; what is the product.
- 2) **Conduit**; which format the content is delivered,
- 3) **Consumption**; how the consumer experiences or uses the content and
- 4) **Convergence**; how different media channels and technologies come together to deliver the content

One of the most characteristic phenomenon for the entertainment product is the perishability of it (Lieberman - Esgate 2003, 3). While products and services concentrate on fitting the need of consumers, they have long life cycle since the need does not change. However, the need of entertainment bases itself on the consumption of different experiences. That causes the life cycle of an entertainment product can be as short as few months to half a year. However, the IPs are product of entertainment industry (Lieberman-Esgate 2003, 5) and investing in the own IP from early on, is the key for longer life cycles. Therefore it is imperative to acknowledge the branding of the commercial entertainment product from early on.

2 BRANDING THE GAME CONCEPT

Every game starts with conceptualizing of what sort of game should be developed. Marketing should have an important role right from the beginning, because it can provide useful guidelines to narrow down possible options to choose how to design and develop the game further. From a marketing perspective, this phase is often considered as the branding of the game.

A successful brand creates a unique feeling of the product that responds customers' values and personal taste (Blythe 2008, 133). Especially in entertainment, branding the product is essential to elevate an artistic expression to something that appeals in a mass audience with better prospects of return on investment (Lieberman – Esgate 2003, 17). Branding the game helps consumers to differ the games from each other as well as it helps them to identify easier, if the game suits for their taste.

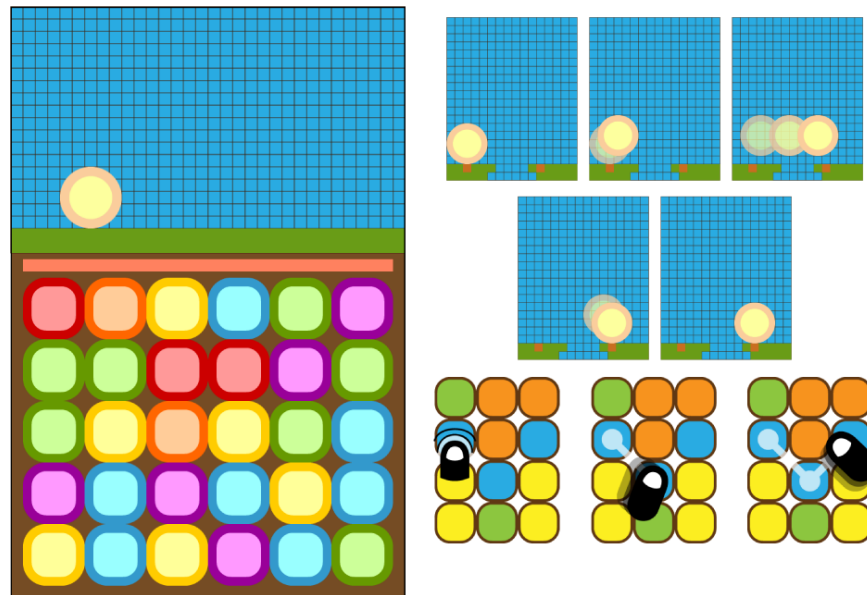
Creating a brand for a new game is not creating a one-hit wonders; it should be a continuing effort to create the content more meaningful for players to engage with. According to David Perry, there are three practical aspects to consider, when creating new brand for the game (Perry 2008, 59);

- 1) **Property** – the game's content can be branded, such as a game character, the concept or a series of successful games
- 2) **Vision** – the general appearance of the game to keep the experience coherent with game design and art direction.
- 3) **Partners** – the parties involved in the development process, the promotion as well as expanding the game IP to other areas.

However, these aspects are inspecting the game brand only from the practical point of view. Therefore it is imperative to inspect the game concept also from a marketing point of view to have a strong foundation for making the necessary creative decisions for the game brand.

2.1 Case Puzzleplatform Game Concept

The prototype for game Puzzleplatform was developed by Emppu Nurminen and Jarkko Honkanen during the spring 2013 in Protomo facilities. The game concept combines Match 3-gameplay and platform genre together with novel type of subgenre for puzzle games. The player controls the character by playing Match 3-gameplay and reacting the challenges the level provides for the character.



PICTURE 2: The core game loop for Puzzleplatform.

Already the game concept shows it has appeal on casual audience that likes puzzle games. However the major issues with the game concept was how to find the fun of playing the game for right audience; should the game be more tactical game concentrating on the gameplay of the Match 3-puzzle or should the levels be action-packed to create fast-flowing game experience?



PICTURE 3: Fastpaced action-platform Sonic the Hedgehog (left) and slowpaced, beat'em up-platform Turrican (source: Mobygames.com).

This also raised questions how these each aspects should be catered? Despite both Match 3-gameplay and platform genre have steady mass-appeal among casual gamers, the problem is finding the suitable theme combining these both aspects. Tactical gameplay favours the different actions of the game character thus making good argument to create a beat'em up-platform game. However the fast-flowing gameplay has strong appeal to play the game more reaction-based thus making good argument for such action-platform game.

3 TARGET AUDIENCE

For years, games have been mass-marketed for audience identified as “gamers”; people for whom videogames are a hobby. However, as Zackarriasson and Wilson point out that this definition is too large and vague to be used (Zackarriasson & Wilson 2012, 59); gamers are diverse group of people and even some gamers do not even identify themselves because of casual nature of their playing. Therefore it is imperative to start identifying different groups of gamers and find the groups that support the game concept or give guidelines to develop the game concept further.

3.1 Segments

To define the target audience, the audience called “gamers” has to be divided in smaller segments. There are 4 commonly used segmentations (Blythe 2008, 77-78);

- 1) **Demographic** bases itself on statistical information
- 2) **Psychographic** defines the different personal tastes,
- 3) **Behavioral** charts the behavior of the consumer and
- 4) **Geographic** explores the cultural differences

3.1.1 Demographic Segmentation

Demographic segmentation is based on statistical data. For game development purposes, age and gender are the most valid measurements. Schell defines that age indicates two types of valid information in larger sense; learning abilities and life situation (Schell 2003, 100).

Children between 0 to 13-year old do have clear restrictions of their **knowledge and skills** they can use to play the games. This age group should be divided even smaller groups, if the game is aimed directly to them;

- 1) **0 to 3-years old: Infant/Toddlers** have the strictest restrictions due their skills. Their life experience revolves around on basic functions of learning about their surrounding world.
- 2) **4 to 6-years old: Preschoolers** can adapt more complicated problems and mechanics than toddlers, but the communication barriers do demand intuitive, auditive and visual helps to interact with the game.
- 3) **7 to 10-years old: Kids** can already read, but their vocabulary is still evolving and communicating with simple enough vocabulary is one of the key issues, when designing specifically for this age group.
- 4) **10 to 13-year old: Preteens**

Older age groups are more distinguishable according to their **life situation** rather than their knowledge or skill levels (Schell 2008, 100-101).

13 to 24-years-old: Teens/Young Adults have more free time to use to playing games than other age groups and therefore they are valid target audience when it comes to sell more time-demanding games.

25 to 34-years-old: Adults are in transition to take more responsibility of their lives in their job and/or relationships and most often this reduces their free time activity. While gaming as hobby might be enjoyed in far more casual matter than before, the core audience in this age bracket tends to invest in their gaming hobby vast amount of money and time.

35 to 50-years-old: Parents have more of a communal sense of gaming. They are more eager to find game experiences, which the whole family can experience, and they are not really afraid to invest on it.

51 + years-old: "Empty nesters" have more time to themselves again: they are facing retirement soon and family life does not take that much energy anymore. This age group is more interested in social aspect of games such as golf.

Gender is another measurement that can define marketing as well as game design. In game design perspective there are certain elements that favor more men than women and vice versa (Jesse Schell 2003, 103-105).

Men like mastering skills, competing against each other, destroying things, spatial puzzles and learning by trying. Men tend to do a single task at the time and they are more spontaneous players when in groups.

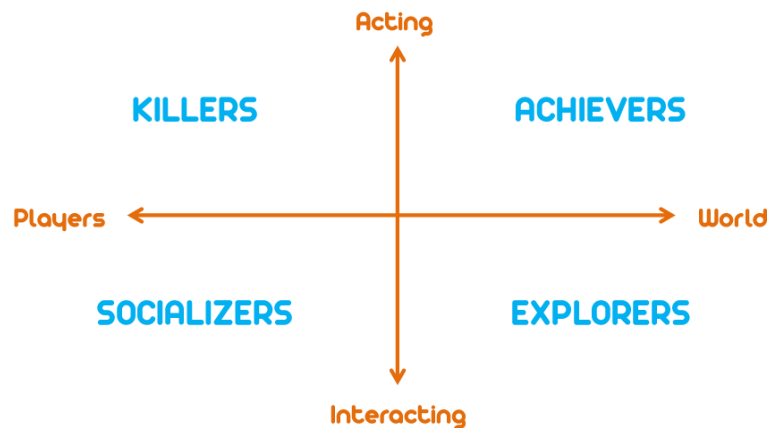
Women prefer emotional engagement, real world themes, nurturing, verbal puzzles and learning by example. Women are multitasking more successfully than men, but they are not that spontaneous players as men.

The gender is touchy topic and it raises PR-catastrophes time to time. While these controversial games include game design elements favoring only other gender (such as nurturing or destruction), it is rarely the reason they are criticized. The PR-fiascos come when these games neglect the other gender by the game content itself. For example, covering fashion games with just pink and purple or war games with scantily-clad ladies have potentiality to exclude other gender out simply because of the content rather the game mechanics themselves.

3.1.2 Psychographic Segmentation

Psychographic segmentation is considered more accurate from player's point of view; it is based itself on a personal taste rather than the factors the players can not affect themselves (i.e. age, gender). This is why this segmentation is a problematic way to classify gamers since personal taste in games varies in many factors and they can overlap.

- Sensation
- Fantasy
- Narrative
- Challenge
- Fellowship
- Discovery
- Expression
- Submission

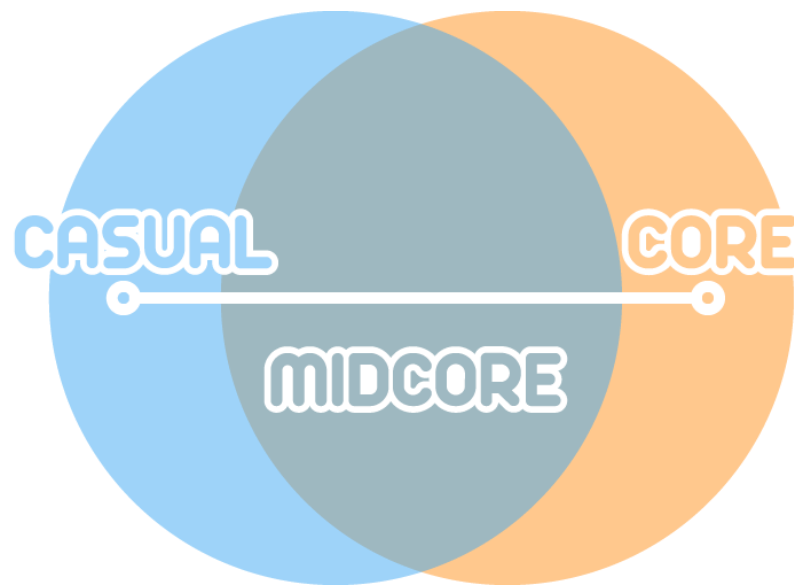


PICTURE 4: Le Blanc's taxonomy of game pleasures (left) and Bartle's Taxonomy of player types (right).

From a game designer's perspective psychographic segmentation concentrates on either what motivates the player (Le Blanc's taxonomy) or how the player plays the game (Bartle's taxonomy). As Jesse Schell points out (Schell 2008, 111) both of the taxonomies have their weaknesses for not completing every aspect that makes games pleasurable entertainment.

However, these taxonomies are seen among game genre classification. Game genre should not be overlooked even though it might be impossible to define. It might provide interesting channels to market the game, when thinking what genres overlap with the game pleasures of game concept. For example if word-to-mouth marketing with Minecraft had not worked so well, it might have been good call to target the marketing of that game to such channels and forums that concentrate on game genres basing themselves exploration and self-expression.

3.1.3 Behavioral Segmentation



PICTURE 5: Casual and core consumer behavior do overlap.

Behavioral segmentation indicates how consumers perceive or use the product (Blythe 2008, 77-78). In game design this means the player's relationship to playing games compared to other activities and this is most commonly indicated with casual/core-attitude. Casual and core have been considered to be the opposites of each other, while casual and core are rather the opposite ends in the whole line of diverse consumer behaviors. However, Trefry argues that there are certain expectations for casual games (Trefry 2012, 1):

- 1) Simple game mechanics makes the play sessions easily amusing for all skill levels
- 2) The gameplay adapts in player's life so the gameplay content is not too demanding
- 3) Easily identifiable appearance makes easier for gamers to define are they interested of the game



PICTURE 6: Controls of Happy Street on mobile (Happy Street by Godzi Labs, 2012 on mobile platforms).

Happy Street is good example of casual game; the idea of the game is to build own town in the street view. Happy Street does not require skills to start the game and any skill required is learned during the game. Despite being simulation game, Happy Street provides constant activity with the characters that habit the street and player is rewarded for this more than players that do not interact with the characters. The art is also quite graphical and clearly distinguishable from other similar games on mobile such as Tiny Towers and The Simpsons Tapped Out.

Equally core games have their own distinguishable characteristics:

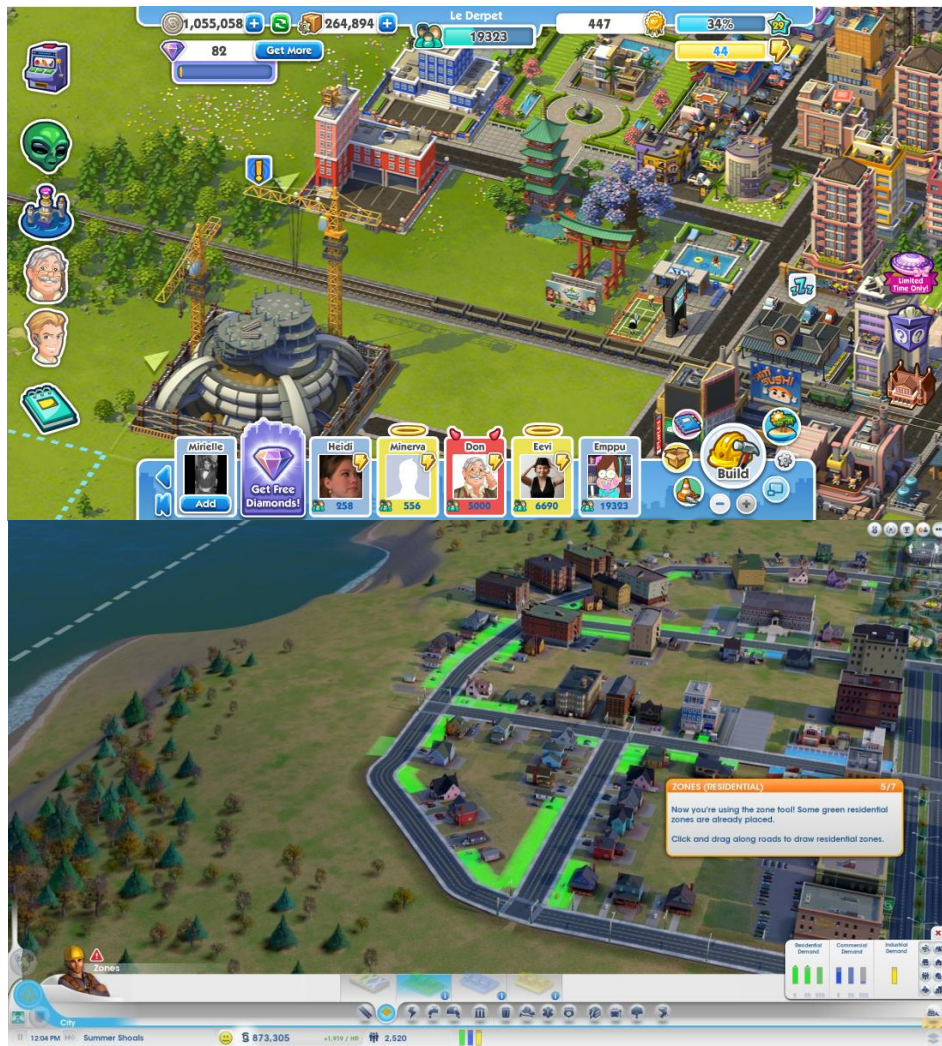
- 1) Complicated game mechanics and multiple learning curves to reach the proficiency.
- 2) Meaningful incentives than gameplay alone (such as story) creates more intensive and demanding experience.
- 3) Harder to identify from each other due heavily favoring realistic immersion.



PICTURE 7: Controls of Dark Souls on PC (source: Gamingmasters.org).

Dark Souls is good example of core game; the controls appear complex, if there is no previous experience with games using similar controls. Also, the game does not give options for adjustable skill levels and death has serious consequences during the game thus raising the challenge of the game even higher. The art is imitating realism as best as it can to create realistic immersion, although, the game might be hard to differ from other similar games.

Majority of the game concepts do not favor so strictly one end of the casual - core – axis and there is a lot of room to move for any game concept in this axis.



PICTURE 8: SimCity Social (up) and SimCity (down) emphasize different takes on game experience (source: Gamingtrend.com).

EA's SimCity is good example of catering the same game concept for casual audience as well as core audience. In SimCity Social, the game relies on catering the game sessions in small chunks, while in SimCity player needs to play the game longer game sessions to see any significant process. SimCity Social game experience relies on few active gameplay such as collecting resources, completing quests and helping friends. Meanwhile SimCity reacts more slowly to player's actions, but there are more different activities and they affect more imminent to each other creating more complex and intensive game experience. However, either of these games is not strictly a core or casual game, but both of them favor strongly different kinds of playing attitudes.

3.1.4 Geographical Segmentation

Geographical segmentation divides the market according to different locations. Despite most of the games aiming for an international market, there are regional preferences that can be used to figure out market potential, for example Germany has an interest peak in realistic simulation games, South-Korea is a well-established market area with skill-based games and Japan has a really hard market to penetrate for their own minimalistic and story-driven taste.

When entering international markets, the localization of the game can go quite deep in game design despite it is commonly misinterpreted as just translating the written and spoken content. Typical localization issues are the game content tune-up for cultural context such as favoring differently designed cityscapes for German and British audiences.

3.2 Targeting

Once the gamers are identified as different segments, it is now easier to pick up valid segment or segments to target the marketing at (hence the term “target audience). To select the target audience helps to define the core of marketing strategy for the game (Blythe 2008, 82-83);

- 1) **Niche marketing** focuses in strictly defined target audience that has clear demand that sort of games without actually mass-appeal to find wider audience. Hard-core simulations such as flight- and truck-simulation games have this sort of audience.
- 2) **Differentiated marketing** concentrates on few segments that define the target audience; for example, if game is wanted to achieve Japanese teen girls, who like casual games, there are potential customers in Western societies among same age gap that are interested in Japanese culture.
- 3) **Undifferentiated marketing** does not focus on any specific segments and delivers the content for everyone. This is technically impossible among game marketing despite some developers might think otherwise. Lavish promotion among bigger publishers might make marketing look like aimless efforts to get buyers’ attention despite publishers have clear marketing strategies.

This raises the question if the game concept should fit with the target audience, or vice versa. Defining the suitable segments depends on which phase the game concept is. If the game concept is fully fleshed out, it might be more beneficial to decide the segment according to the game concept, but if there is not any game concept to begin with, it might be equally fruitful to figure out marketing gaps and develop a game for a neglected audience.

3.3 Case Puzzleplatform: Target audience



PICTURE 9: The game 10 000 000 (left) and well-known dungeon crawl Diablo (right) (source: Sw-extreme.com).

The target audience of Puzzleplatform is considered as casual gamers. The initial game concept idea, 10 000 000, has been catered already to appeal for players of dungeon crawl subgenre. It favored strongly people that had background in old RPGs and that was the initial reason to tackle with the game concept to make it more mass-appealing as well as friendlier for casual audience.

The age bracket for Puzzleplatform was set to 16 to 24-year old. The idea is to filter out kids and younger teens to avoid the imminent misunderstandings with the freemium business model and reduce the risk of spending money without understanding the consequences.

Also, the gameplay of Puzzleplatform was assumed to have appeal among women due nature of multitasking between puzzle gameplay and the platform section. This was backed up after first round of prototyping and testings; the game appeared quite complex for men to grasp the gameplay idea, while it took women less time to understand the idea. While men concentrated merely on the puzzle game, the platform section of the game was completely ignored and it even puzzled people when the game ended for running out of time.

4 MARKET RESEARCH

The purpose of market research is to gather relevant data of the marketplace. As David Michael mentions the purpose of market research can be as simple as proving that there is an audience for the game concept (Michael 2003, 74). Yet most of the time market research is conducted to finding out advantages to be used in the market place or pinpointing the problems involved in the marketing of the product (Blythe 2008, 96).

There are two different research strategies to gain relevant data from the markets (Blythe 2008, 98);

- 1) **Primary researches** are the first-hand data and researches are conducted to gain direct information for the reason the research is conducted. For example if the developers want to examine their players' relationship with the game they have developed, the developers cannot find that information from any other sources.
- 2) **Secondary researches** are conducted by others and the data might not directly answer the questions about the markets. For example, researches studying customer behavior in mobile environments gives hints on how the game might succeed in that platform, but the researches do not give direct answers on how to succeed in the those platforms.

Especially when developing the game title with no direct user base to gain information about, secondary researches have invaluable data to look into. However, if the secondary researches do not bring any answers to questions why marketplace is researched for, there is one type of method to be used.

4.1 Benchmarking

Benchmarking is comparing processes and metrics of best solutions in the industry (Stepenhurst 2009, 3). In game development it can include several aspects of the games. For benchmarking, it is imperative to identify the aspects to be benchmarked between competitors to find the marketing gaps to be used for marketing advantages (Stepenhurst 2009, 6). For example comparing specific genre games together and noticing the lack of freemium versions is a clear market advantage and to fill that market gap would be financially wise.

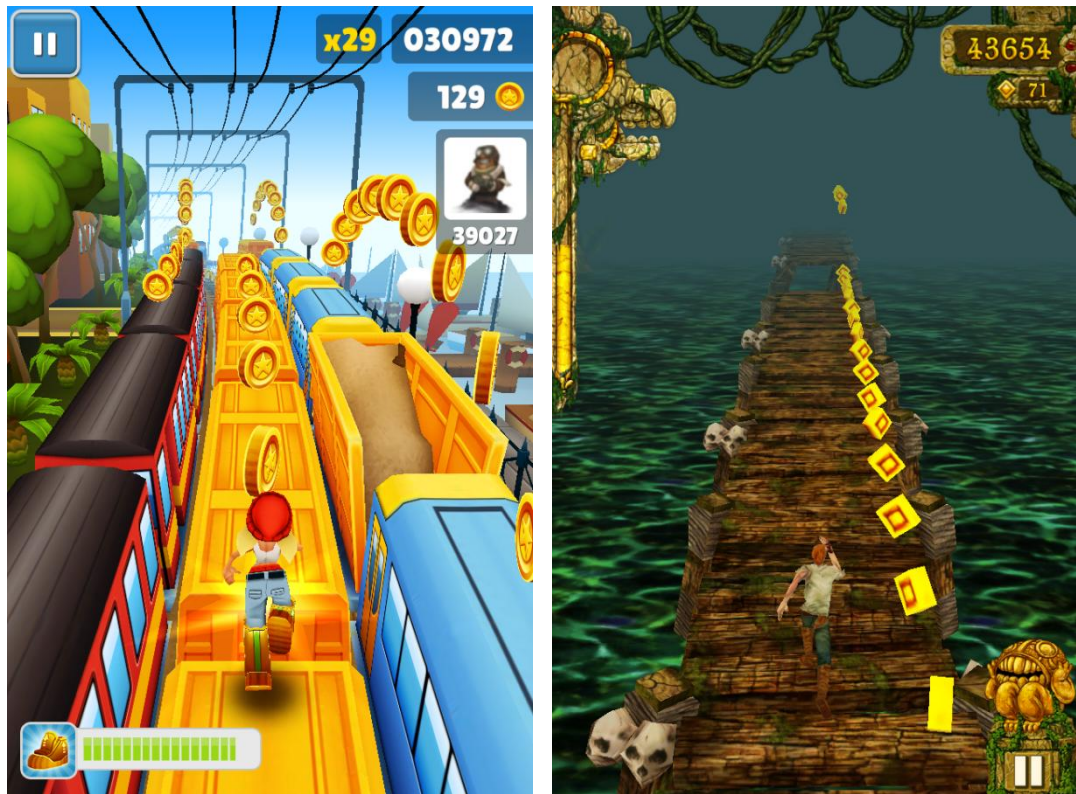
When benchmarking games, it is also important to acknowledge all the different aspects from their respective point of views. Condensing information is fatal in benchmarking since the different aspects might have connection with each other. Ignoring promotional aspect in games can lead to false assumptions, such as the visual appealing of the game was the only factor for the popularity of it.

4.2 Aspects of market research

It is imperative to look at the markets from different perspectives to acknowledge the appropriate advantages and weaknesses for developing a more successful game. According to Blythe, there are several aspects of market research (Blythe 2008, 96-97):

Customer research is used to gather information about the market segments. This means finding out how the customers use their money, what motivates them and what the current trends are in the industry terms.

Product research is used to find new means to use the product or to develop it more effectively. In game industry this means either finding the way to use the game mechanics in another context, creating the first sequel for a new IP, or in the case of a completely new IP, to position the game more clearly in the marketplace.



PICTURE 10: Subway Surfers (left) is a clear contender to Temple Run (right).

For example Subway Surfers is very similar to Temple Run, but the developers have put constant effort to differ the game from Temple Run. This is done by catering the core mechanics differently as well as the more cartoonish visual. Both games are not only popular, but also profitable in the very same marketplace they are in.

Distribution research intends to find out the most appropriate channels to distribute the product. In game industry this does not mean only the technological perspective such as Facebook, Nintendo DS or Xbox 360, but also publishing partners and potential retailers.

Promotion research measures the promotional efforts compared to its objectives. In game industry this means measuring the data when the game is promoted actively and analyzing how it meets the objectives the promotion is done for.

Sales research is information gathered to help the sale process. In game industry it means most often the business model of the game and how those models are balanced to the point that they generate revenues.

4.3 Case Puzzleplatform: Market Research

The initial market research for Puzzleplatform was quite simple as David Michael described it. However, marketplace for mobile games is highly saturated and really competitive. Therefore it is imperative to look how the competition is performing according the general popularity among the App Store.

4.3.1 Reasons to conduct the market research

There were three reasons to conduct the market research;

- 1) Is there an audience for this type of game?
- 2) Do the competitive games neglect some segment?
- 3) And furthermore, how these games perform in their marketplaces?

4.3.2 Gathering and filtering data

After asking people's recommendations similar to the game that has been the initial inspiration (10 000 000), it appeared that there were several games that combined the puzzle gameplay with other genres. However, some of these games were borrowing more elements from core games rather than letting the gameplay itself to be amusing. Puzzle & Dragons is good example of leveraging several layers of gameplay, and despite Dungeon Raid is quite casual from its gameplay, the game experience is more demanding than casual games in general.

In the end, three games were picked for closer view for catering the most casual game experience;

- 1) 10 000 000 by EightyEight Games
- 2) Puzzle Saga by Flipscrip
- 3) Puzzle Craft by Chillingo

All of these games combine the simple puzzle game mechanic with some other genre to make the puzzle gameplay more interesting to play. They all were released around same time during autumn 2012.

4.3.3 Analyzing the game experience



PICTURE 11: 10 000 000 (left), Puzzle Quest (center) or Puzzle Saga (right).

Just by looking at these games, there is already one obvious market gap; none of them are neither bright nor playful looking. Despite Puzzle Saga and Puzzle Quest appearing most cartoonish in graphic wise, they have no fresh, playful colors to attract the player.

From the game experience perspective, both Puzzle Saga and Puzzle Quest are the most appealing to casual audience. Puzzle Saga's gameplay is extremely simple and the effects of upgrading can be seen instantly. The general theme of building own village in Puzzle Quest has clear appeal on casual audience.

10 000 000 has also game elements that appeal the casual players; it is an endless runner and the puzzle game itself is extremely simple. However, the graphics might be a turn-off for casual gamers due nature of nostalgic pixel graphics. The connection between the gameplay and upgrading system is not easy to figure out either.

One of the most dominating elements in each of these games is how upgrading existing characters or realms is actually the main motivation to keep playing the game, rather than the puzzle gameplay itself. This reveals that there are no real options for plain hyper-casual audience to play the game just the sake of the puzzle gameplay's itself.

4.3.4 Analyzing the performance in the marketplace

Looking at the data visualizations of download rates of these games gives better understanding of their marketplace performance. Excitingly, all of them are performing differently from each other rather than sharing similar pattern in long run.



PICTURE 12: Download ranks of 10 000 000 from launch to end of the year in each App Store category (source: Appannie.com).

10 000 000 is a premium game and notable download spikes were caused by media or App Store coverage. Despite being a premium game, 10 000 000 does not yet seem to show the long tail effect that kicks in for majority of games in App Store after couple of months.



PICTURE 13: Download ranks of Puzzle Craft from launch to end of the year in each App Store category year (source: Appannie.com).

Long tail effect can be seen with Puzzle Craft and the first clear spike happens to be, when the game was turned from premium to free game.



PICTURE 14: Download ranks of Puzzle Saga from launch to end of the year in each App Store category year (source: Appannie.com).

Puzzle Saga is more fragmented; the game has steadily gone free and back to premium game causing the major spikes, but otherwise the download rates have steadily declined.

It is clear that there is an audience for these games, but to avoid misinterpretations from these charts, it has been made clear, why 10 000 000 and Puzzle Craft outperform Puzzle Saga.

10 000 000 generated a massive word-of-mouth buzz in early August and later on the game got featured multiple times in App Store. The game got so popular that it got in Steam's marketplace before it was released on Android. This is the type of success story independent developers love. Unfortunately that kind of success stories are scarce compared to those who have actively trying to make their own success like Puzzle Craft.

Puzzle Craft did not have that sort of organic buzz online, but it had a publisher that made sure there was media coverage about the game. Just like many other games Chillingo has published, Puzzle Craft follows the same pattern. However, it seems to be a small success, considering the game has been constantly featured in App Store ever since.

Puzzle Saga did not have a game publisher nor was it able to generate massive word-of-mouth marketing. There might have been other reasons why Puzzle Saga did not tap in the right audience such as the casual aesthetics and gameplay seeming too casual, despite the concept being more suited to more core audience. The name choice was also unfortunate, since it gets mixed up with King.com's Puzzle Saga thus makes it harder to relocate in social medias and search engines.

4.3.5 Conclusion

In light of this knowledge it is safe to draw the following conclusions;

- 1) While the need for this type of games is not imminent, there is a clear market gap that favors more casual aesthetics and game experience. This is the market gap Puzzleplatform tries to fill.
- 2) Both Puzzle Quest and Puzzle Saga have been dabbling between premium and freemium business models. While both games have ended up turning their business into freemium games, there might be another marketing gap for a game involving freemium business model right from the beginning.

5 BUSINESS MODEL

Commercial entertainment is not commercial unless it generates revenues. It is important to consider how to monetize the content and how that affects the game experience. As David Perry predicted (Perry 2009, 43), the majority of publishing platforms these days are heavily digitalized and over the years the numbers of retail versions have been steadily declining. The digitalized storefronts of Steam, consoles, mobiles and social medias offer far more options to monetize game content than the game alone. Therefore it is imperative to consider different monetization strategies – business models – to create and cater to different types of buyer behaviors for the players to support their unique relationship with the game.

5.1 Business models

The two dominating business model strategies are freemium and premium. Both models can include elements from each other, but it is important to choose the primary business model during development phase for successful game experience.

5.1.1 Premium monetization

Premium monetization means to grant the access to the game content after paying the asked price (Fields-Cotton 2012, 151). Premium monetization is simpler than freemium since it might not need such instant nurturing and analyzing to gain revenues, unlike freemium monetization.

In its simplest form, **up-front payment for the complete game** is the most typical one and is often considered the only option if there are no other means to monetize the content. Games that use this model alone are most often indie games and short games that want to provide the game experience exclusively as independent – one-hit wonders – without any downloadable content and multiplayer experiences (which majority of AAA-games do monetize). They do not provide game experience with any further branches for the game or do not have resources for other options.



PICTURE 15: The Walking Dead's episode selection (source: Applenaps.com).

Episode/expansion pack based models are optimal for cases that require intensive gameplay, but developers want to serve the content in several pieces to ensure the audience attention for the game. For example Tell Tale Games uses this model quite successfully in slow-paced narrative games.

Subscription-based model is familiar from many online games and require a regular a fee to access the content. From the developer's point of view, this model is ideal; it guarantees more a predicable income and game development of the game can be designed accordingly. Unfortunately this model is winding down due to the popularity of freemium games.

5.1.2 Freemium monetization

Freemium monetization is based on giving the core game experience for free by including several means to gain revenues from players that play the game (Fields-Cotton 2012, 156-157). Freemium games are maintained more like services than one-hit wonders. However, the freemium monetization can be applied on premium models for creating additional revenues.

Consumable items are often game dynamics that can be used only once, but bought several times. Most often these types of items can be bought either in-game soft currency (earned by playing the game), hard currency (can be earned by playing the game, but is far more scarce than soft currency), power-ups (improve the gameplay) or by turns to play the game longer. For example many casual games involve a timer that allows players to play another round after certain time. The monetization in this model is based on skipping that waiting period.

Collectible items are game dynamics that alter the game permanently. These items give the player a clear advantage for game dynamics and are most suitable for audience that seeks a deeper engagement with the game experience. Good example of this are coin doublers that double the amount of currency the player gathers while playing the game.

Content items are actual gameplay content that either upgrades the game from freemium to premium or are additional monetization point in premium or freemium game. Buying access to locked levels is one typical example of this monetization method.

Customizing items affect only the visual content of the game. Unless the game is based on customizable content (dollhouse games), these items are more often considered as charity items that give money to developers rather than expanding the game experience.

5.2 Other Means of Monetization



PICTURE 16: Coca Cola as promotional game content in Restaurant City (source: gamerboom.com).

Game experiences can be monetized by implementing existing IPs and brands in the game as **advertisements**. This can be done either with implementing the IP/brand as a part of the game experience or implementing the whole IP or brand in the game. For example Disney has implemented its IPs directly to the game experience by using Imani's popular game concept, Temple Run. Two different IPs have been provided this way already, Brave and Oz the Great and Powerful.

Monetizing the game IP instead of the gameplay can be successful if the IP is introduced for right market. Rovio is a good example of continuing their Angry Birds IP on various platforms and merchandises, while Game Bakers have concentrated their Squids IP strictly on storytelling mediums.

5.3 Case Puzzleplatform: Business model

The business model of Puzzleplatform has been considered to be freemium from the very beginning. One of the key monetization mechanics in Puzzleplatform will be the limited amount of times to play the game per day.

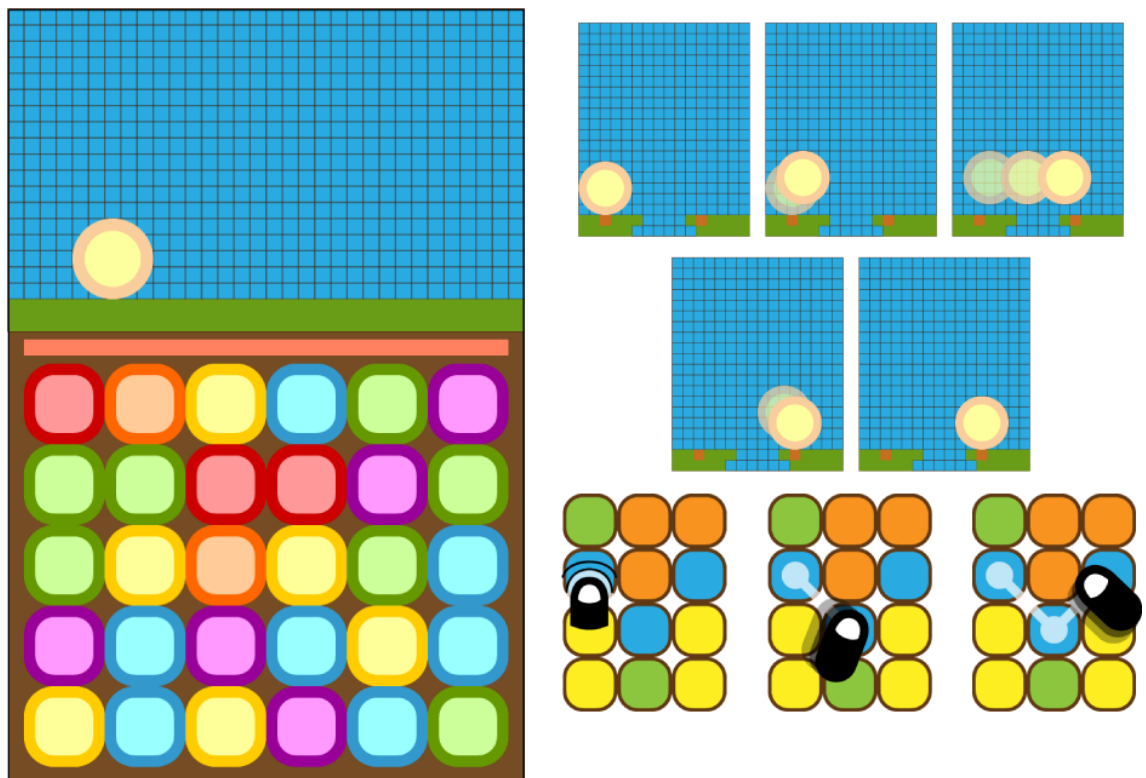
However, picking up a monetization model out of the blue is not the best idea for carefully planned marketing. One key problem with this type of monetization model has been the lack of concrete and accurate data to back up if this type of monetization is actually profitable. Naturally with games that have succeeded with this model (such as Candy Crush Saga, Bubble Mania and Diamond Dash), the information is next to impossible to get. Unfortunately there seems to be no other end with this monetization model – or in other words, postmortems telling how this model did not work well in short-term despite the model require long-term investment. The danger here is to make the assumption that this is the no-brain model to moneymaking. However, lack of proper data is one of the main motivations to actually use this type of monetization in our game.

From a game design's perspective, this type of model is quite deal-breaker; hyper-casual audience likes it since the model fits their lifestyle. However, any other audiences are impossible to reach since “limited times per hour”-models are perceived restricting the game experience. Instead of annoying the players with the short game experience, each game session imitates how the game character actually travels during the day and stops to sleep, when night comes. The player may buy more energy to play the game character during the night and hopefully this will create a seamless game experience as well as purchasing experience that makes sense from the player's point of view.

6 EFFECTS ON GAME DESIGN

Once the market aspects for the game concept have been examined, they will give the necessary guidelines to communicate clearly with the consumers by the game experience itself. With Puzzleplatform, the most important issues were how the game mechanics are balanced, how the gameplay content is presented and how the art is directed to bring together all.

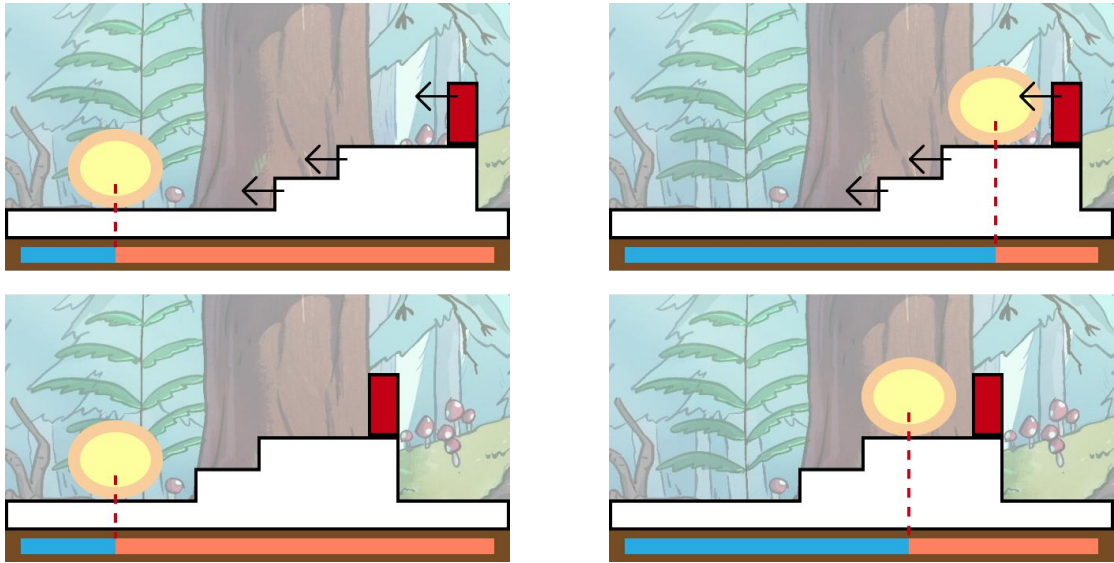
6.1 Balancing the Game Mechanics



PICTURE 17: The core loop of Puzzleplatform.

According to Schell, game mechanics are the core structure of interactions between different elements in the game (Schell 2008, 130). In Puzzleplatform the mechanics are simple; when player connects three or more similar blocks with each other, the game character reacts in a certain matter. This is the core loop of Puzzleplatform.

However, it brought up an interesting problem; if the player needed the character to perform certain actions, but there was no suitable block available, the player needed to use other blocks to get the desired blocks. This meant the game character would perform unwanted actions when player would use other blocks than needed. Therefore the game was programmed so that the character would remember the most recent action and would use it when such possibility would come upon. This gave two different opportunities to play the game; Speedy mode and Tactic mode.



PICTURE 18: Mockup of game scene in Speedy mode.

In Speedy mode the player had a sort of a timer that was defined by the position of the game character on the game scene. Game scene moves steadily from right to left, while the game character moves from left to right (left picture). When the game character faced an obstacle, it stopped, but the game scene kept moving. When the game character got closer to the left edge when facing the obstacle, the player had lesser and lesser time to react to the obstacle (right picture). This favored more reaction-based playing, when there was little time to react to each obstacle and the player's observation is concentrated on the game scene rather than the game board.

In Tactic mode, instead of timer, player had a limited amount of turns to be used to get through the obstacles. Like in Speedy mode, the game scene moves left and the game character moves right, but instead of facing an obstacle, the game scene stops moving. This time player concentrates more on the game board rather the game scene itself, bringing the bigger role of game board as a reason to play the game.

From a marketing perspective, the Tactic mode suits better for casual gamers. The Speedy mode is motivating due the limited time, but it is too intensive to just stop the game and get back to it later to carry on, unlike the Tactic mode. Also, the less intensive game experience of tactic mode makes it suitable to play the game in various situations, such as walking on the street.

6.2 Gameplay Content

Gameplay content is the elements of the player interacting with the rules of gameplay. There are three types of content; precisely designed content (such as levels and NPCs to interact with), dynamic content (such as other players, customizable avatars and other game elements that are affected by player's previous actions) and self-generating content (such as piece of code randomizing different combos from predefined game elements).

These can overlap with each other depending on what sort of expression is wanted to be delivered for the player. The multiplayer modes in FPS-games are good examples of this; the game provides the level, but the players create the dynamics of the game by exploring and shooting each other.

In Puzzleplatform, there were two options; precisely designed content (levels) or self-generating content (endless runner). The major difference between these two is that precisely designed content generates a more meaningful game experience and is not over used among casual games. Also this type of content fits better with the main monetization aspect the Puzzleplatform has, by tapping the player's curiosity of what challenges the next level will provide.

6.3 Vision

Since the target audience was defined to be casual gamers, especially women, it was easy to choose a theme that appeared friendly and inviting. The game character is a bee that needs to find its way back to the beehive and the game world is a micro cosmos of an average street. Every phase of the street has its own theme to keep the player's interested.

Art direction is crucial for delivering the desired vision. Although the art direction has to be compromised according to the available skills, there are three general visual styles that dominate the game industry.

- 1) **Retro style** or pixel graphics that have nostalgic value in the indie scene.
- 2) **Realistic style** that tries to achieve realistic view with graphics resembling 3D feeling.
- 3) **Cartoon style** that tries to achieve a clear identifiable and unique style.



PICTURE 19: The main inspiration for the art direction, Adventure Time (left) and Sims Social (right) (sources: Frederator.com and Foodista.com)



PICTURE 20: Art direction implemented.

Since the target audience for Puzzleplatform is casual women gamers, the art direction was chosen to be cartoonish. The keywords for the art direction were cute, quirky and adorable, and to avoid alienating guys, Sims Social's and Adventure Time's art style was in a key role to help keeping the art direction not becoming too cutesy. Also the further branding of the game was acknowledged in art direction and character design to make it easier to have the IP usable in other forms.

7 CONCLUSIONS

In my opinion, marketing in game design does not mean tight shackles of restrictions, but more of creative challenges to develop the game and as a game designer. As it turns out, the effects of choosing a target audience has wide consequences over different aspects of marketing, as well as game design. Despite there being no conflicted interests in Puzzleplatform so far, there is a possibility to bring out such interests: will the future solutions be best for both marketing and game experience or does it cripple other one essentially? When dealing publishers this might be the key issue, and I think it is essential to understand their point of view too.

When it comes to the practical aspect of game design, the business model has a big role. However, it is hard to say, how big of a trouble changing monetization options will become when the model is not thought out during the game's development. Thinking about the business model while developing the game creates a game design more flexible to react to the sudden changes involving monetization.

Finally, while game design does not affect the promotional conventions of the marketing, it helps the promotional parties to identify the game easier. Finding the appropriate channels to promote the game helps the game find its true audience instead of trying aimlessly to promote the game in every possible situation.

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