



Stanford eCorner

Lessons Learned: Game Development

Nick Earl, *Electronic Arts*; Arcadia Kim, *Electronic Arts*; Erin Turner, *Electronic Arts*

November 12, 2003

Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/722/Lessons-Learned-Game-Development>

Turner talks about lessons learned in game development. The first lesson, she says, is that the product is only as good as the people that build it. The second lesson is to be a customer. In order to create a good product, she notes, the team was using the product everyday. The last lesson is to know when to add more features and when to cut and ship the product.



Transcript

So in terms of the leadership lessons and creative vision, which is one of the unique things about games that makes it a fun industry to work in, really--and this carries over, but the product is only as good as the people that build it. One of the things that allowed us to finish the product on time is the fact that we've had an amazing team. And we had a few cases of team members that weren't working out, and it's really important when you're responsible for shepherding that vision that you identify those issues and either change team members or change the structure of your team. One of the things that people always joke about when they come to visit us at EA is that you'll go to our offices and see that every producer and most of the team members all have a GameBoy and all the different consoles in their office. In order to make a good product, you have to play the product everyday. That means that you need to play the game everyday, which may sound like not very much work, and sometimes I'll tell you it is really fun, but occasionally when you're playing a level that has five or six bugs in it you have a different perspective on the game. But suffice it to say, you need to get to know the game really well in order to be able to evaluate: is the game coming together? And this gets back to what Arcadia was saying earlier is that intangible quality is the gameplay fun. Is this a game that I would want to play for 10 hours? For 15 hours? For 40 hours? And that's a sense that you really have to develop over time. And what's amazing is working with people who have been doing this for 10 or 15 years and seeing how they can hone in right away on what makes a gameplay fun. One of the other things that I would say was a learning for me on this particular product is that up until Alpha, you need to push like hell to get everything in you can in a game, and then as soon as you hit that date, you have to close, close, close.

And that means you have to take all the bugs and the features and stop adding, and then polish to get the game to market. And one of the things you'll see in the game industry is that some producers are really, really great about thinking what they want in a product and some producers are really great about closing to get the product to market, but the secret is really to be able to shift at certain points in a project. And this, of course, is another place that it carries over to almost all the software development. You have to know when to stop adding. And it's tempting with the subjective product, when you want to make it fun, to keep adding until there's no doubt that this product is going to be a best-seller. I've already mentioned the importance of getting it in front of a customer. And the last thing is--and this particularly, I think, is important to producers. When it's your vision, it's very hard to stop adding. It's very hard to accept you can't make the game perfect. So you have to accept that it's going to have to get out to some marketplace.

It's not going to be perfect. It's going to be released. So those are the couple of things that were challenges and learnings from getting the GameBoy to market. So I hope that some of you will pick it up and send me some feedback on what you think

about it. So I'd like to head it over to Arcadia and let her talk about "Lord of the Rings". Why don't we just run that trailer, the DVD. I think there's a Menu. You can choose any one of the--why don't we say...1. EA Games. Challenge everything.

The quest stands upon the edge of a knife. Stray but a little, and it will fail to the ruin of all. The board is set. The pieces are moving. We come to it at last, the great battle of our time. He has been unchallenged long enough.