Games as a Live Service

A 360–Degree Look at the Art & Science
of Managing Social Games

March 2010 | Players Panel

What is Playdom?

Playdom is a leading social games developer committed to bringing people everywhere together through the world's best social games.

#1 on MySpace

#5 on Facebook

What is Playdom?

Playdom's CEO, John Pleasants, was former COO of Electronic Arts

What is Playdom?

300+ employees in 7 offices worldwide

What is Playdom?

3 of the top 25 apps on Facebook

Who Are Our Users?

Ages 13-80

200+ Countries

facebook
hi5
myspace.com
android
iPhone
TAGGED

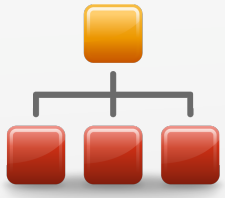
Multiple Platforms

Games as a Live Service: Going Viral

David Stewart

Who am I?

David Stewart — Director of Product



Social
Network API

Virals

Emails

Xpromo

What is Virality?

The game mechanics that drive users to spread the game, and the out-of-game organic communication channels that prompt people to play.

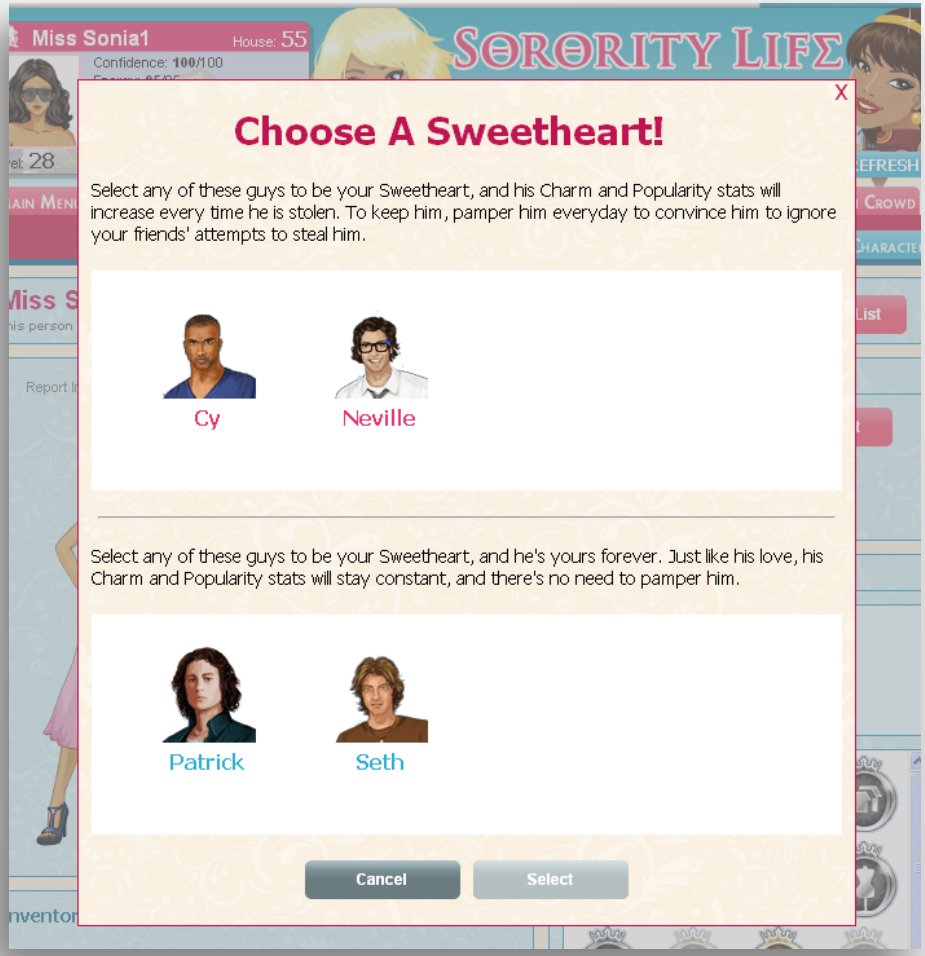
Moving Beyond Spam

My feed

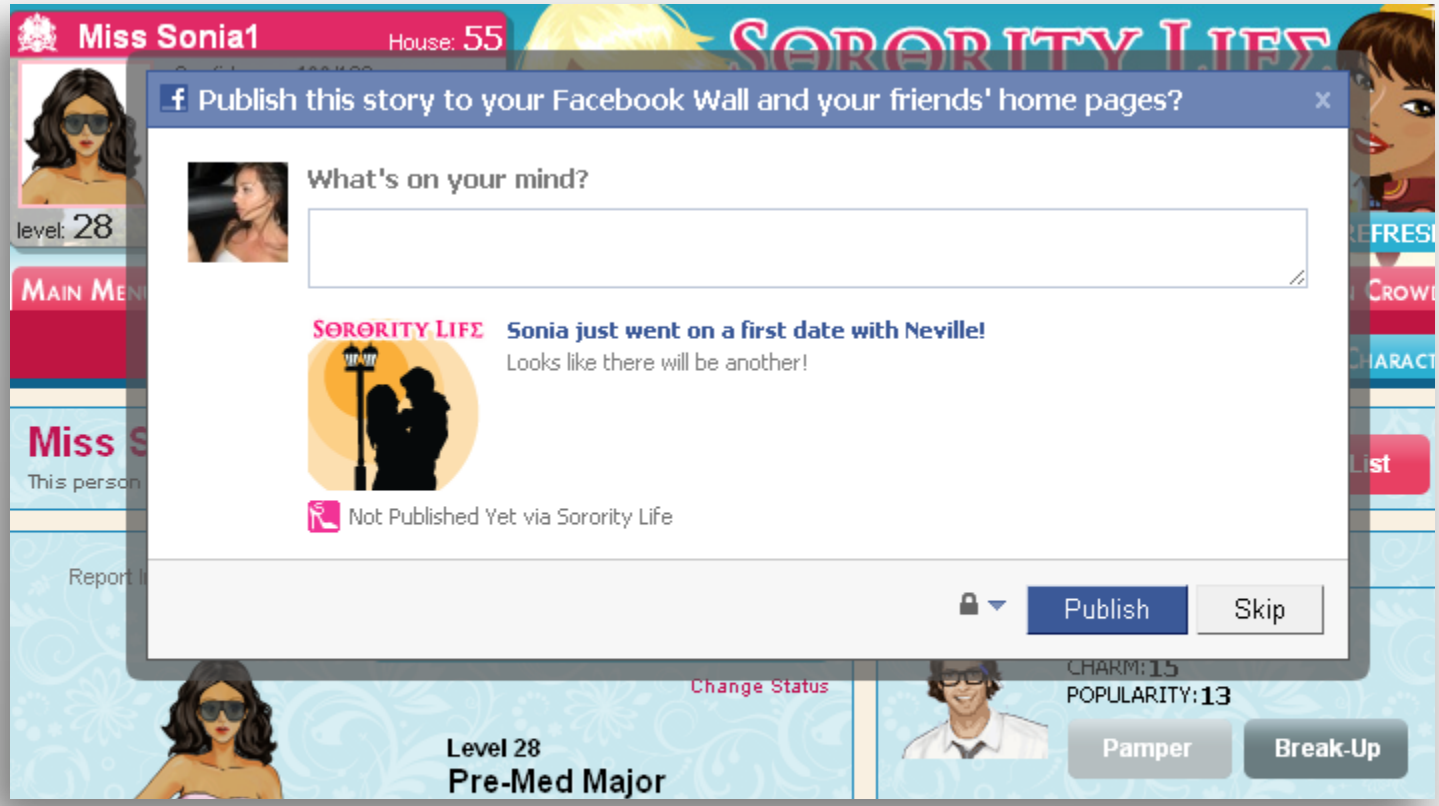
Players' feeds

Moving Beyond Spam

Social Features are the Best Viral Features



Social Features are the Best Viral Features



Social Features are the Best Viral Features

Optimize and Renew

Of the 4 fortune tellers, which do you think works best?

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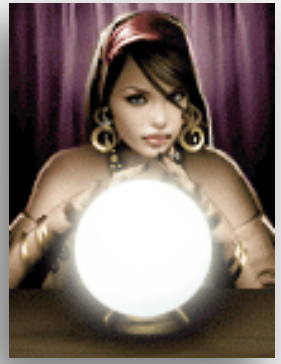
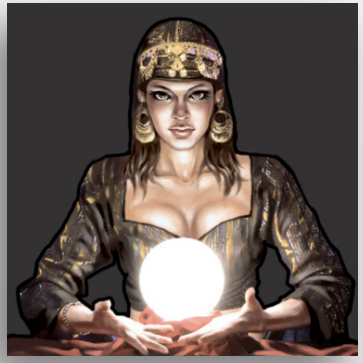
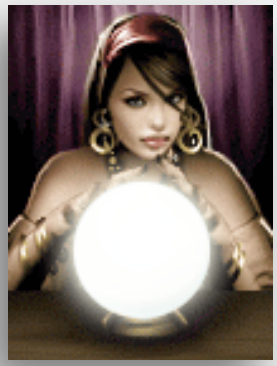
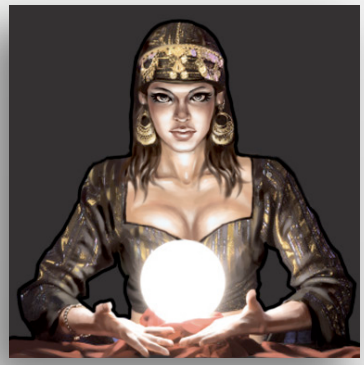




Optimize and Renew

Of the 4 fortune tellers, which do you think works best?

Winner!

Optimize and Renew

Of the 4 fortune tellers, which do you think works best?

Winner!

Optimize and Renew

Winner!

A Bit of Theory

= (infection rate) * (conversion rate)

[summed across all channels]

Example:

Users send out **4** invites on average, and **10%** of those are accepted.

K = (infection rate) * (conversion rate) = (4) * (10%) **= 0.4**

1 person acquired

That user acquires 0.4 new users

Those 0.4 users acquire 0.16 new users

Those 0.16 users acquire 0.064 new users

etc.

Total: **1.67**, or **0.67** new users from virality

Example 2:

What if we can double the number of invites our users send out (from 4 to 8)?

K = (infection rate) * (conversion rate) = (8) * (10%) **= 0.8**

1 person acquired

That user acquires 0.8 new users

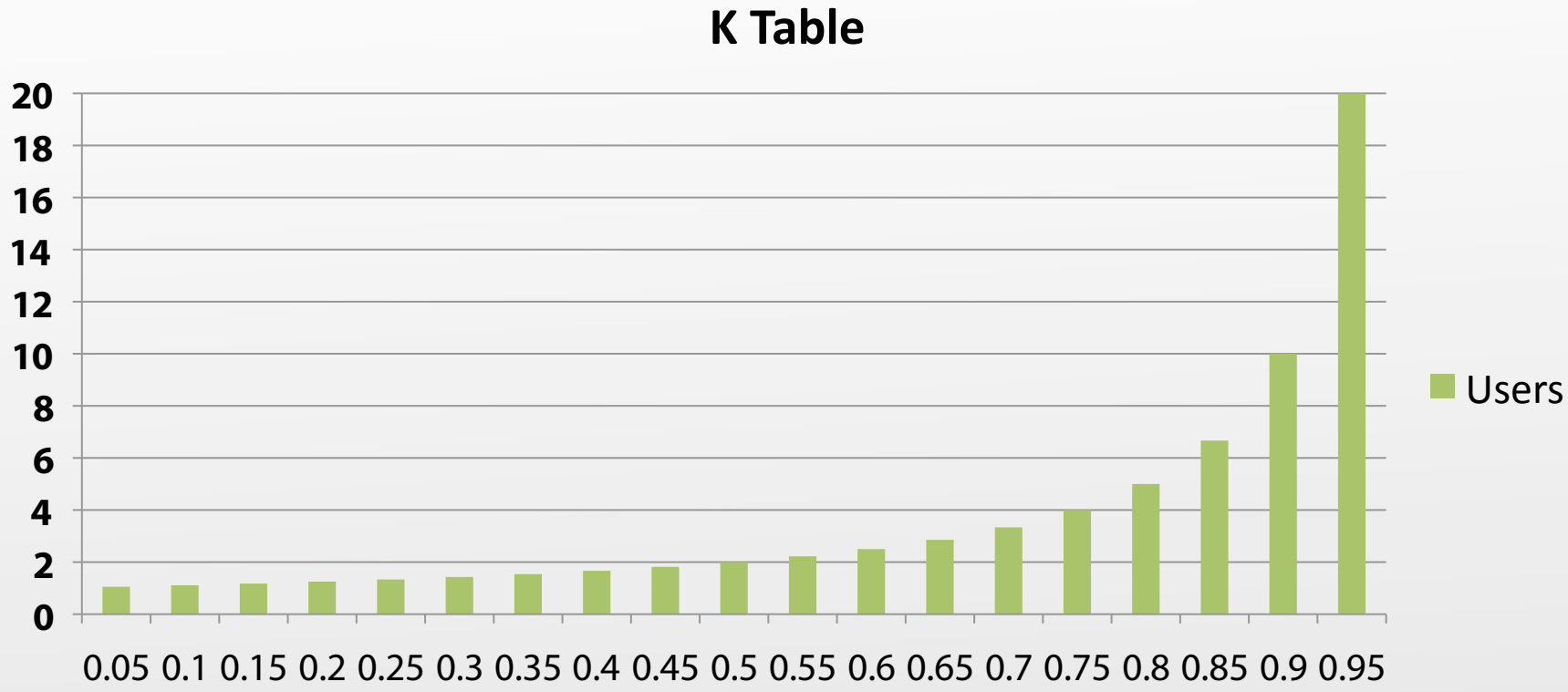
Those 0.8 users acquire 0.64 new users

Those 0.64 users acquire 0.542 new users

etc.

Total: **5**, or **4** new users from virality

Let's see this in a graph:



Highest ROI often comes from focusing where you're already doing best, not most in need of improvement

Five Takeaways

1. Don’t be afraid to prompt players to share.
2. Develop viral/social features as an integral part of gameplay.
3. Tailor features to relevant viral channels.
4. Optimize and refresh content.
5. Focus where you’re already winning.

Thank You

Games as a Live Service: Voice of Customer

Marianne Borenstein

Who am I?

Marianne Borenstein — VP of Customer Experience

Platforms

Support & Community

Loyalty

Rules of Social Gaming

1. Start with a good game
2. You do have a second chance to make a first impression
3. Work in perpetual beta
4. Find the balance
   Game performance vs. new stuff

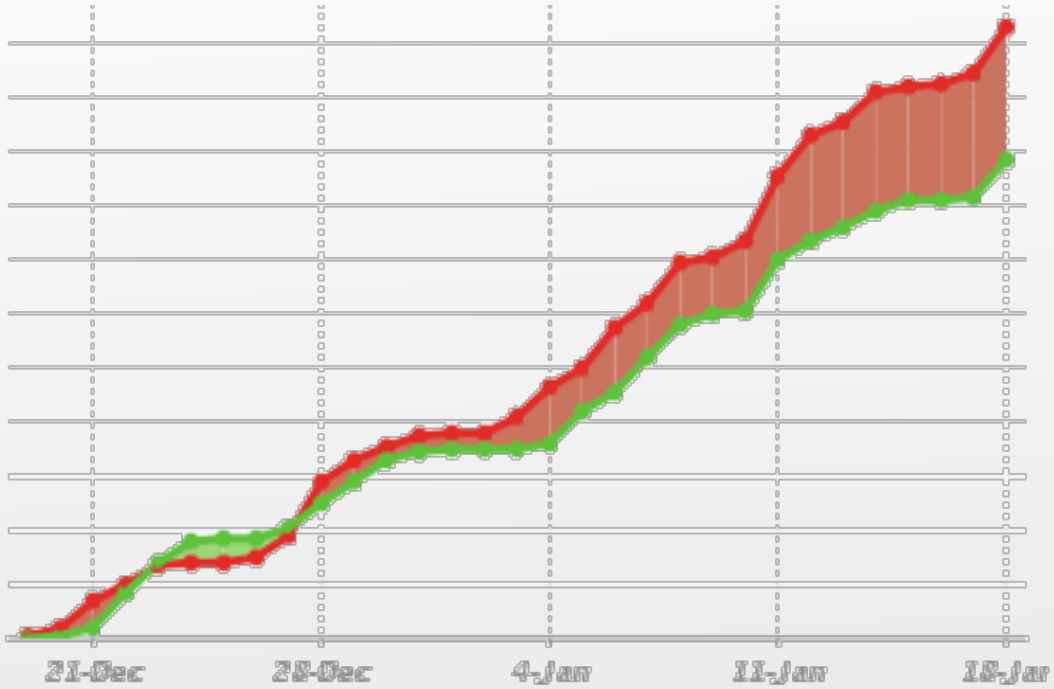
Rules of Social Gaming

How?

Players as QA

- **Tiki Farm launched in Dec. 2009 with a rethink of the traditional farming game:**
  - Tropical theme
  - Never wilting crops
  - Clearing bugs and watering crops

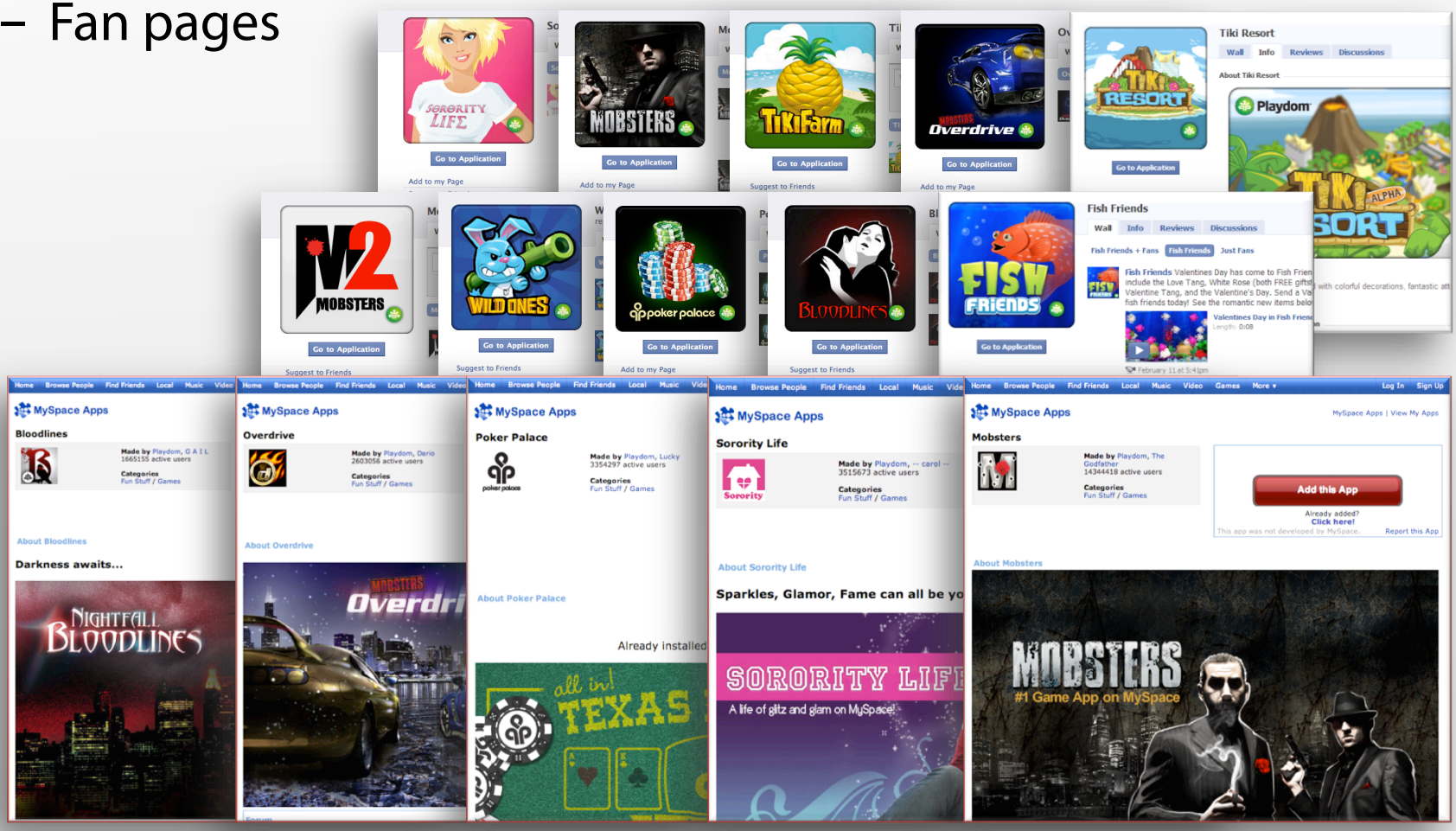
Threshold Balance



- User feedback vs. disruptions
- Bugs vs. features
- Users are the key to game evolution

The Toolbox

- **Engaging users inside and outside of the game:**
  - Fan pages



The Toolbox

- **Engaging users inside and outside of the game:**
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The Toolbox

- **Engaging users inside and outside of the game:**
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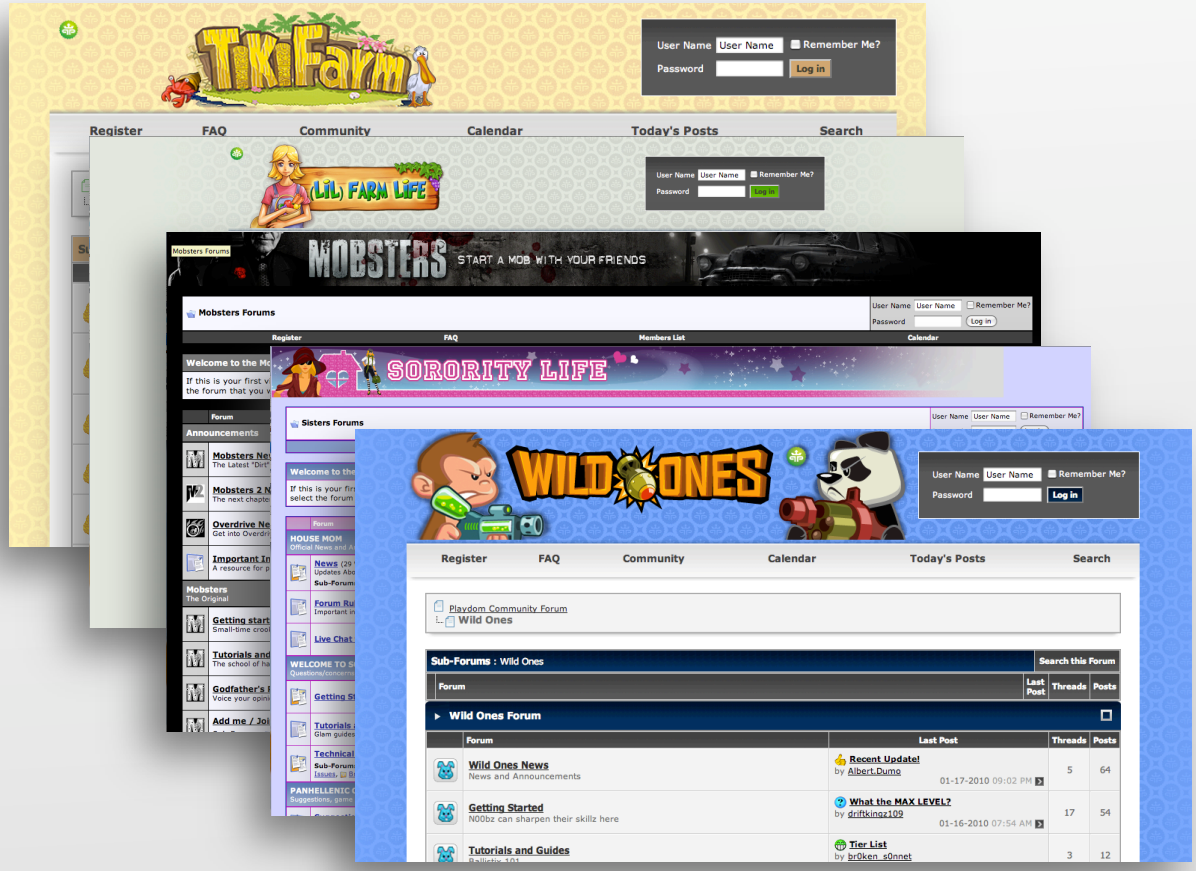
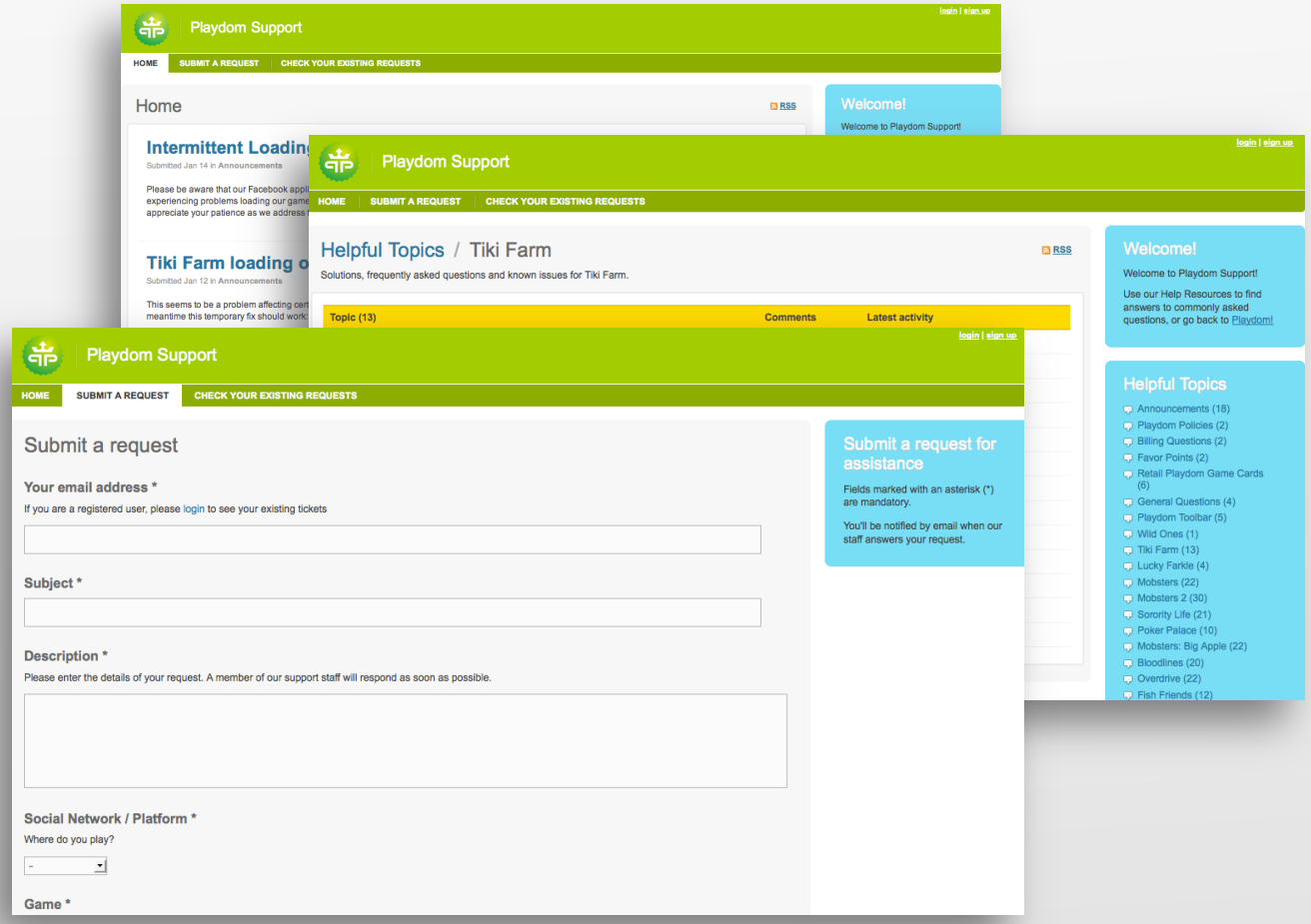
  - Blogs
  - Forums



The Toolbox

- **Engaging users inside and outside of the game:**
  - Fan pages
  - Blogs
  - Forums
  - Support



The Toolbox

- **Engaging users inside and outside of the game:**
  - Fan pages
  - Blogs
  - Forums
  - Support
  - Surveys & Polls

What has been your favorite limited-time gift so far?

Which equipment category needs more items?

In our last Blog Poll we asked: *What location do you spend the most time in?*

1. **The Bronx** 26%
2. **Miami** 18%
3. **Downtown** 15%
4. **Las Vegas** 14%
5. **Grand Cayman** 8%
6. **Chinatown** 7%
7. **Jersey** 7%
8. **Coney Island** 5%

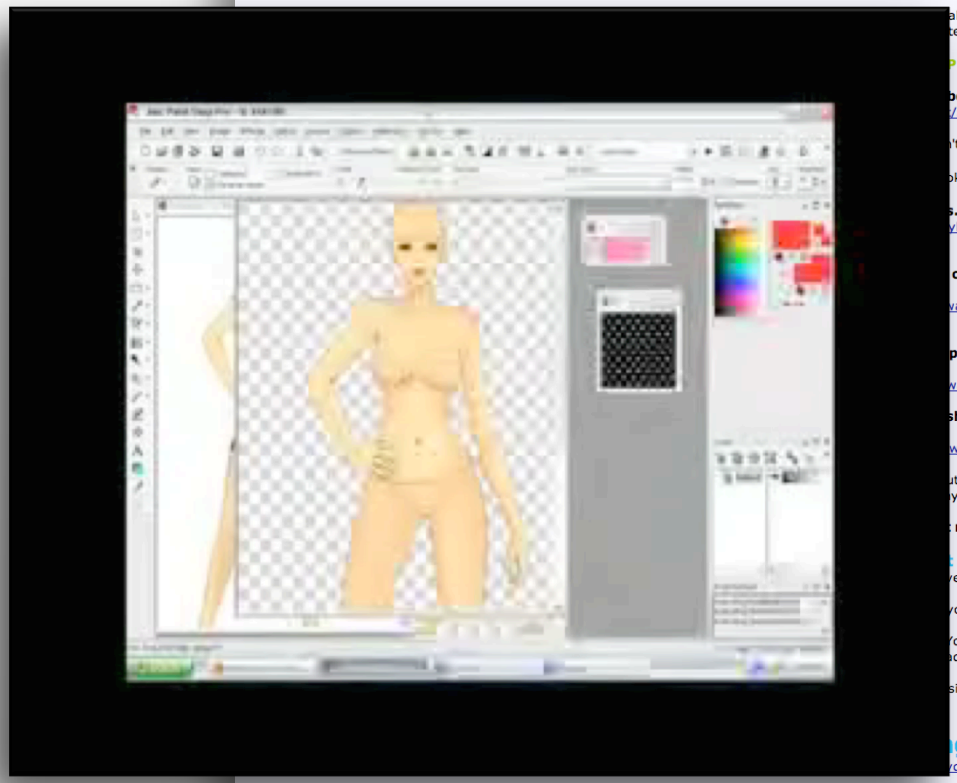
And It's Not Just Us…

Our players have toolboxes too.

Getting Your Hands Dirty

And the Winners Are…

Not Just About Winning



Paint Shop Pro Tutorial:
Sorority Life Contest Designs

ake designs. I made a tutorial for people that have absolutely no graphic design experience. It basically
tell you the basics.

P can be found in my signature

be downloaded here:
/Satelli.../1184951547051

't make a tutorial for it. It may have a lot of the same features though.

ok and should be easy to follow. I also say "um" a lot and I might not be the best teacher.

s. If they are discovered, the designer will be disqualified.
ylifeblog.playdom.com/?page_id=57

outfits with the pen tool and shade:

watch?v=2nw80LjmC4M

patterns and texture:

watch?v=qvvV_ckCNv0

shes, opacity, and shortcuts:

watch?v=Fgu3iRSzsDA

ut hopefully you guys can still follow along.
yway. Some of these rules aren't black and white and have not been set by Playdom**

rules:

t them here rather than PMing me.
veryone can see the answer or the discussion.

your designs don't look spectacular. Just keep practicing!

You don't have to make designs the way that I do.
ade that make them in a different way. **Have fun!**

signs in the design thread, say so in the post so I can comment (if you want)

g your outfit:
ydom.com/?page_id=3

You will need to save your outfit **three ways**:

1. Your **original PSP image file (or .xcf for GIMP or .psd for Photoshop)** so that you can rework it and you can open it back up with layers intact. You should save your file this way as soon as you begin creating. (saved as: Cat.psp)

2. A png file with your outfit on the girl.
Like this: (saved as Cat1.png)

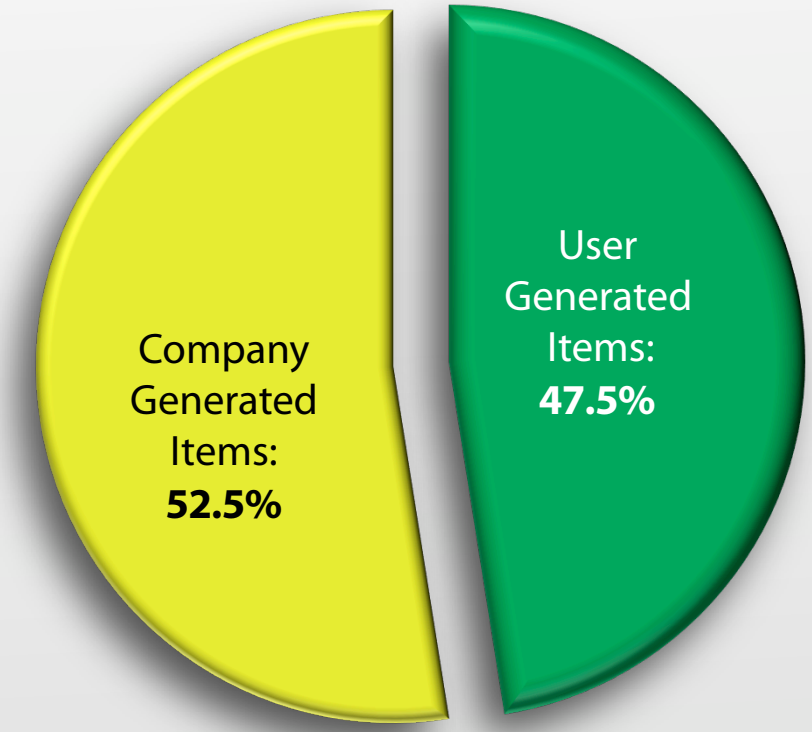
User Generated Content

- **Users involvement on product level**
- **Sorority Life design contests**
  - Increases engagement and reengagement
  - Gives users a bigger voice in game direction
  - Translates to happier users, better product, higher revenues

User Generated Content

Results?

Sorority Life Christmas & New Years
Full-Price LE Item Sales



Future?

- Increase self-serve
- Continue to foster community engagement
- Open the floodgates on UGC
- Increased service for our most valued users

Future?

Ask our users…

Thank You

Social Game Design: Working Carefully on the Fly

David Rohrl

Who am I?

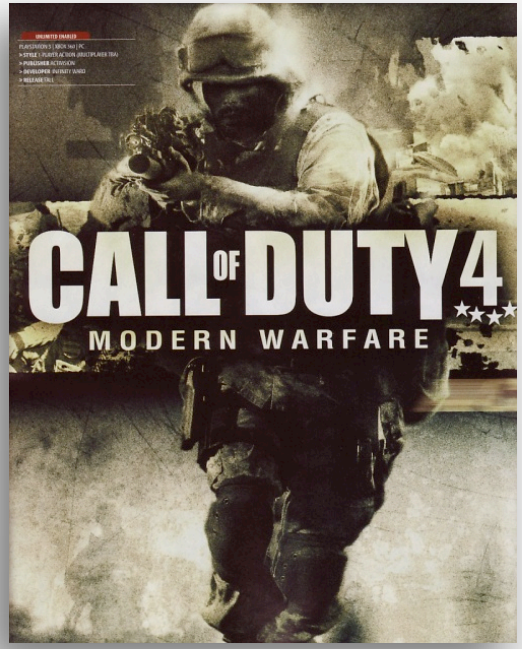
David Rohrl — Creative Director

Game Design

New Concepts

Player Experience

Social Game Design



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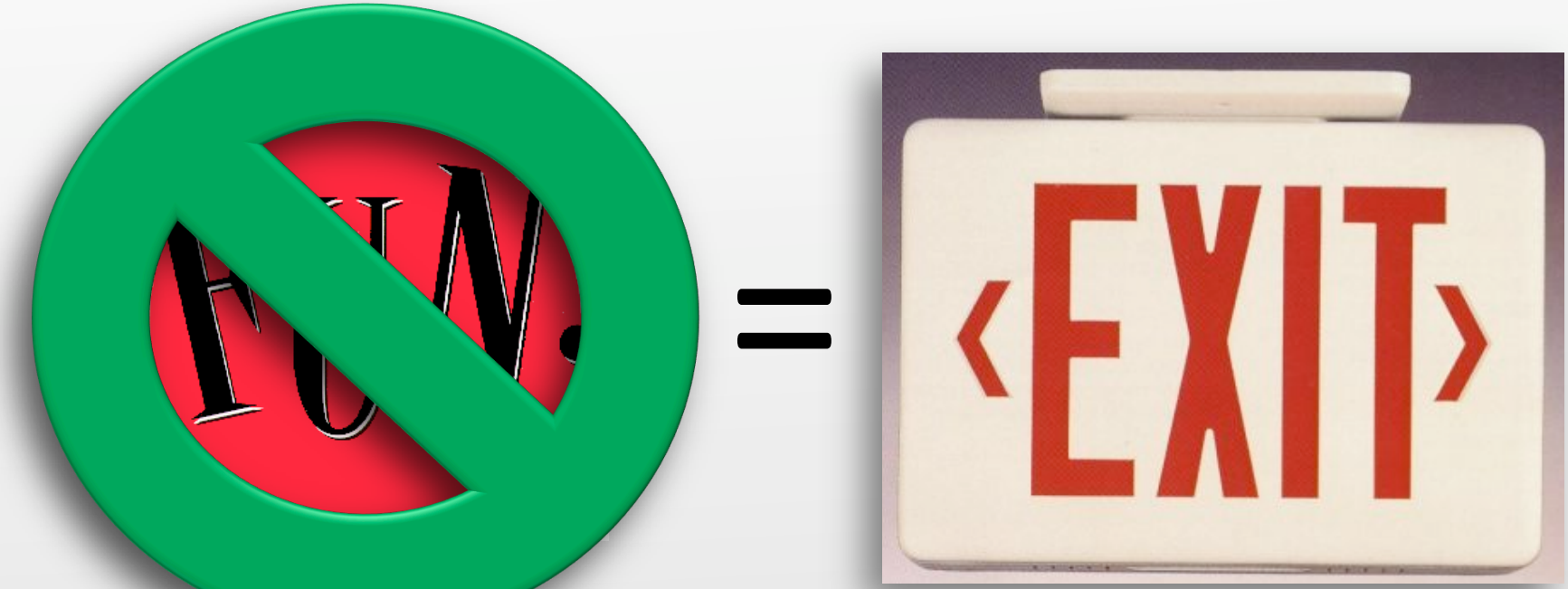
Designing On The Fly

1. You must design in partnership with your customers
2. You must work on constantly changing platforms
3. Your work is never done

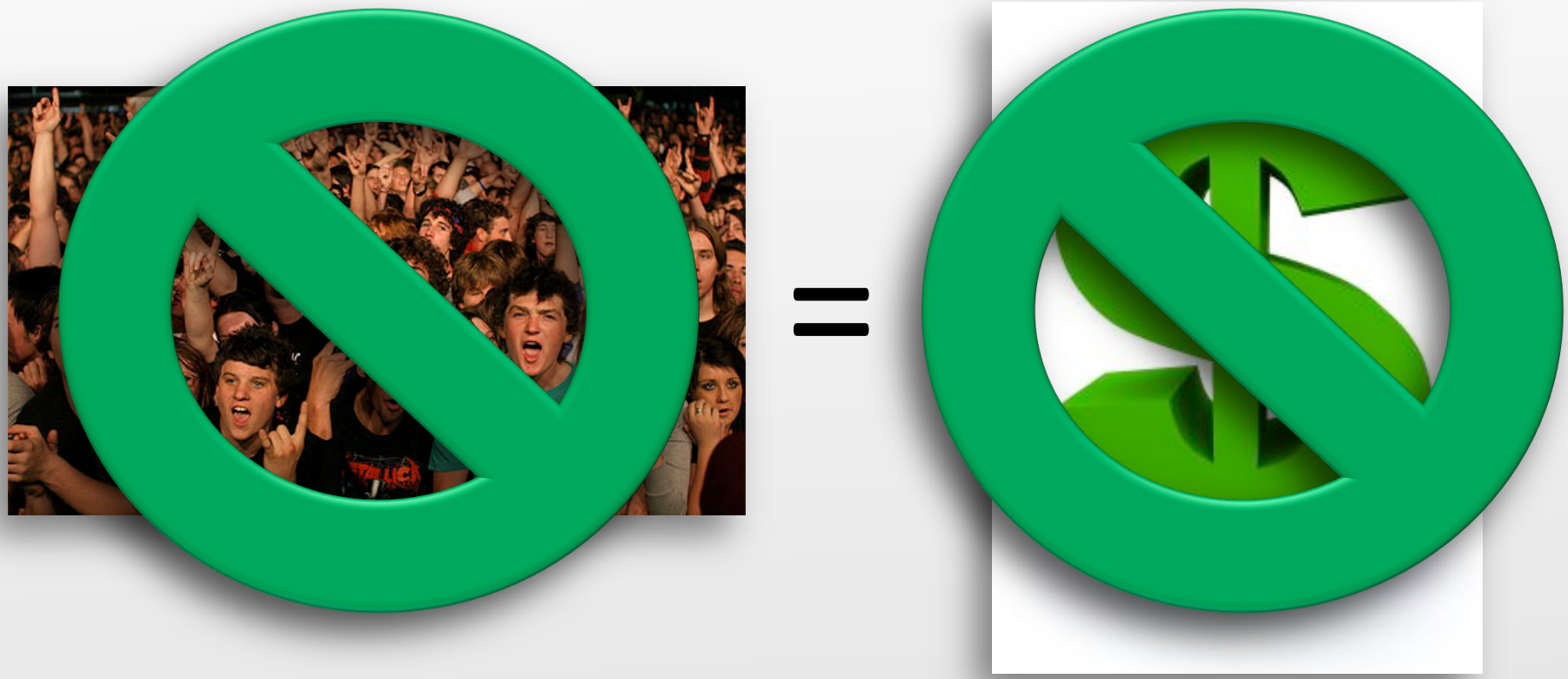
What About Fun?

What About Fun?



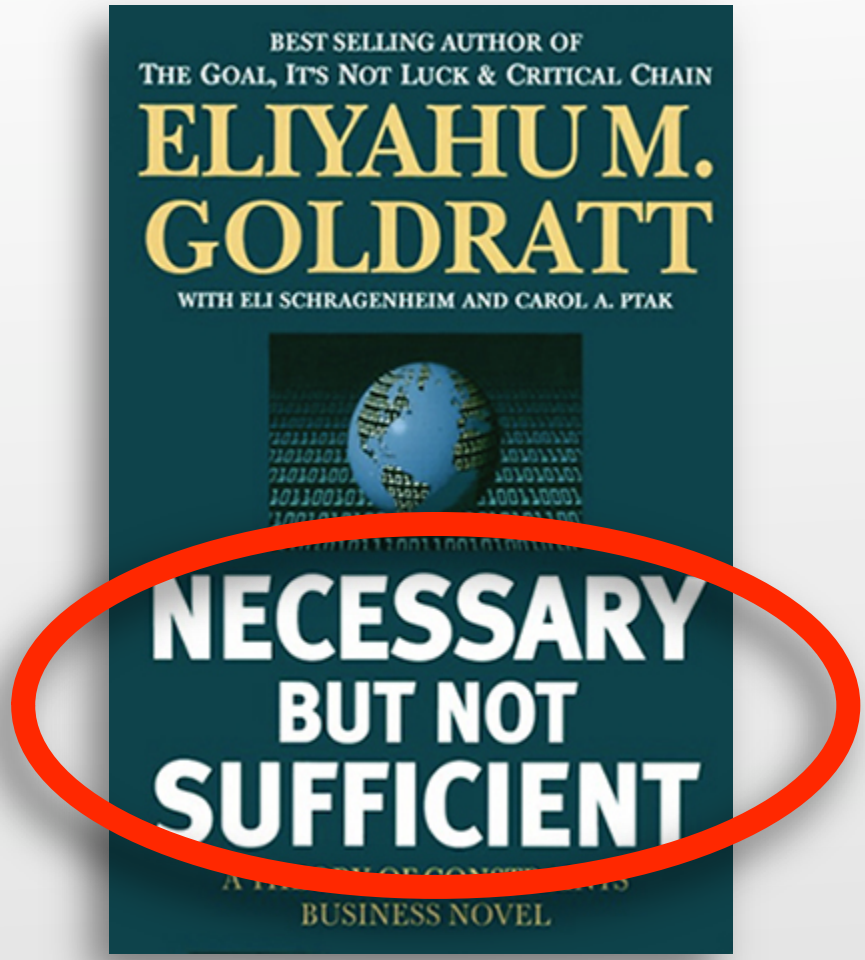
What About Fun?

What About Fun?



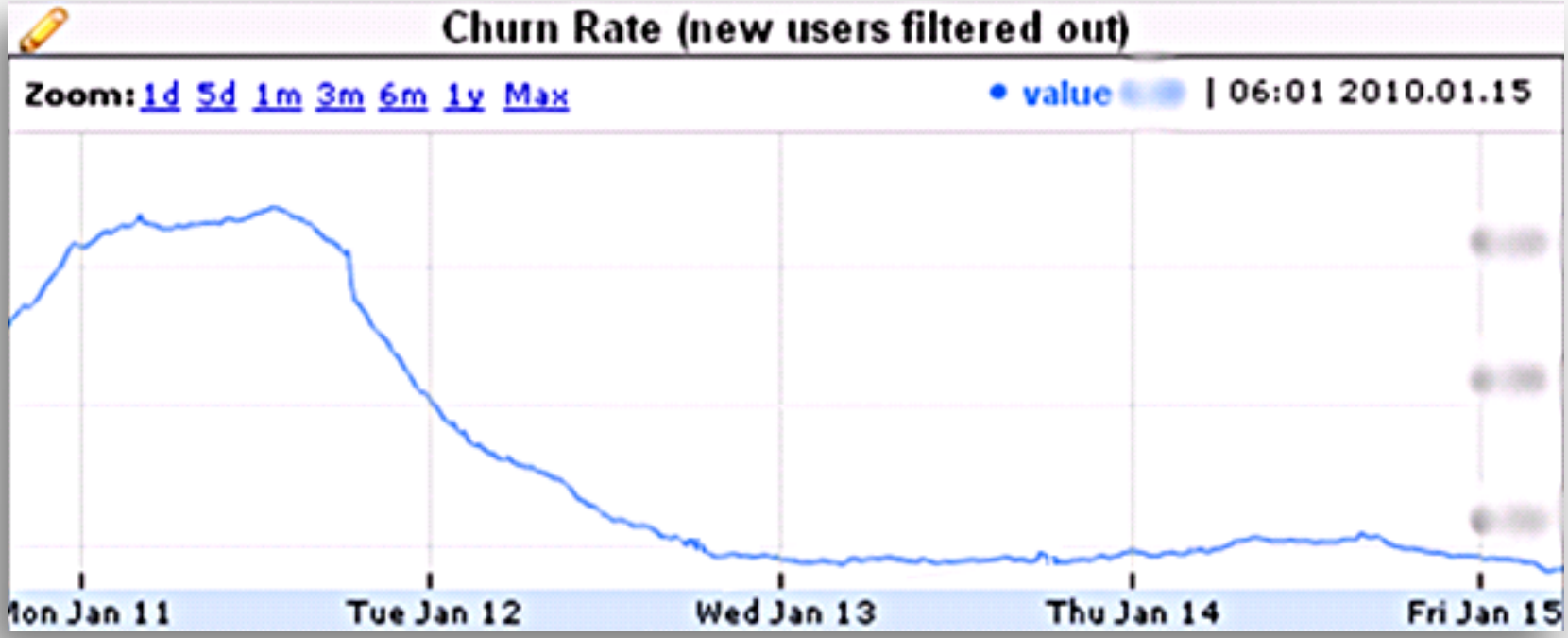
BUT…

FUN, =


BEST SELLING AUTHOR OF
THE GOAL, IT'S NOT LUCK & CRITICAL CHAIN
ELIYAHU M. GOLDRATT
WITH ELI SCHRAGENHEIM AND CAROL A. PTAK
NECESSARY BUT NOT SUFFICIENT
BUSINESS NOVEL

Designing To Shape User Behavior

Designing To Shape User Behavior



Designing In Partnership With Your Customers

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Designing In Partnership With Your Customers

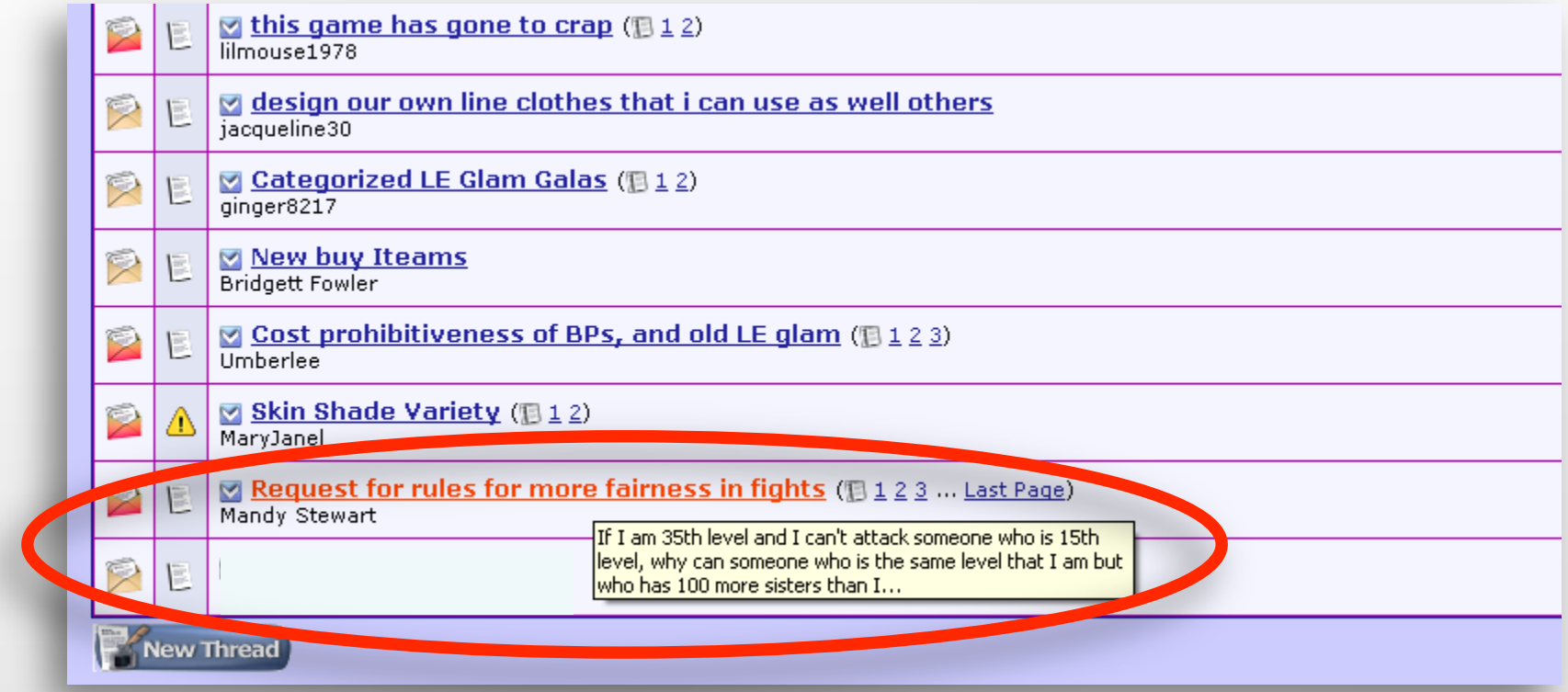
You must do two things after your game launches:

1. Listen to what your customers say (sometimes)
2. Listen to what your customers do (always)

Divanarama
House: 184
Confidence: 108/108
Energy: 90/90
Stamina: 3/3
Cash: $511,027
My Skills
level: 23
Influence: 3394/3450
SORORITY LIFE
REFRESH
Main Menu
Socialize
Jobs
Bank
House Mom
Fight
Glam
Spa
My House
My Self
My Style
Catwalk
In Crowd
?
Socialize
Strut Your Stuff
My Style
Raid Your Closet
Job
Support Your Lifestyle
Glam
Shop 'Til You Drop
Do an Event to gain influence and level up!
Do an event
It's Always Rush Week in Sorority Life!
Notify Clare Rafferty about your house!
Grow House!
Online Now!
Next »
Live News and Broadcasts
Complete
News Only
Broadcast Only
(delete all news and broadcasts)
Tell your sorority what you are up to!
300
Send
2 days ago
Announcement
Partners In Health
HELP for HAITI
Playdom
Run a special charity event and join our Help for Haiti campaign to raise money for Partners in Health. You can

Users Will Give You Good Ideas

And Bad Ones


this game has gone to crap (1 2)
lilmouse1978
design our own line clothes that i can use as well others
jacqueline30
Categorized LE Glam Galas (1 2)
ginger8217
New buy Iteams
Bridgett Fowler
Cost prohibitiveness of BPs, and old LE glam (1 2 3)
Umberlee
Skin Shade Variety (1 2)
MaryJanel
Request for rules for more fairness in fights (1 2 3 ... Last Page)
Mandy Stewart
If I am 35th level and I can't attack someone who is 15th level, why can someone who is the same level that I am but who has 100 more sisters than I...
New Thread

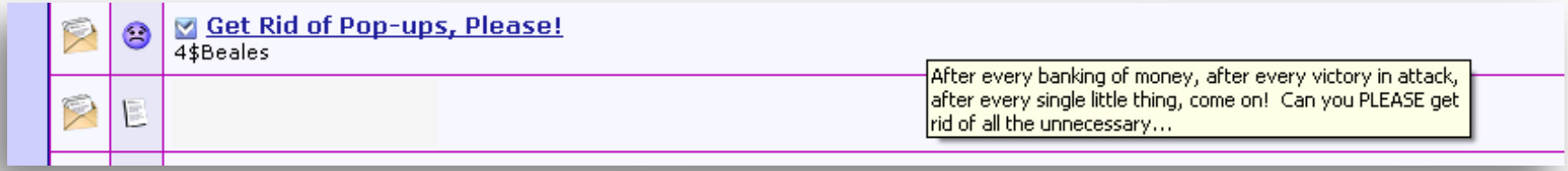
What Are Your Users Good At?

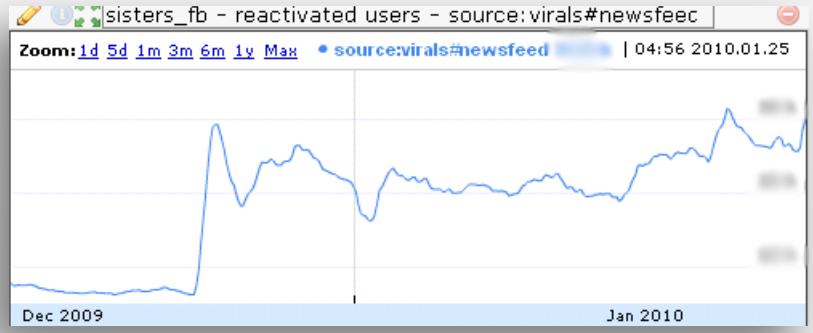
- Telling you how to make your game better for hardcore players
- Telling you where the tactical pain points are
- Giving you ideas for minor improvements to existing features
- Telling you how to add complexity and richness

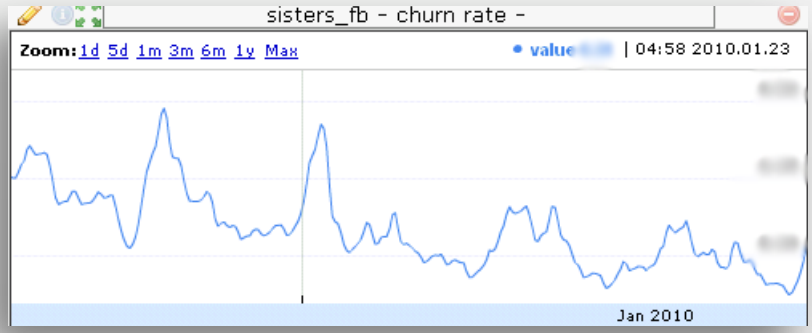
What Are Your Users Bad At?

- Defining your game's vision
- Telling you how to reach a broader market
- Making your game more casual
- Making your game more approachable, elegant, and streamlined

Actions Speak Louder Than Words







So, who is right?

Designing for an Unstable Platform

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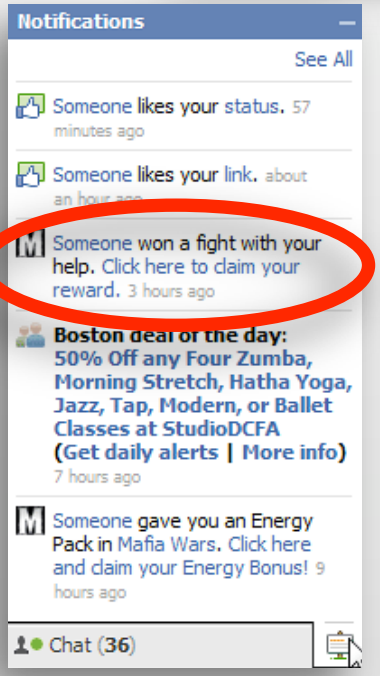
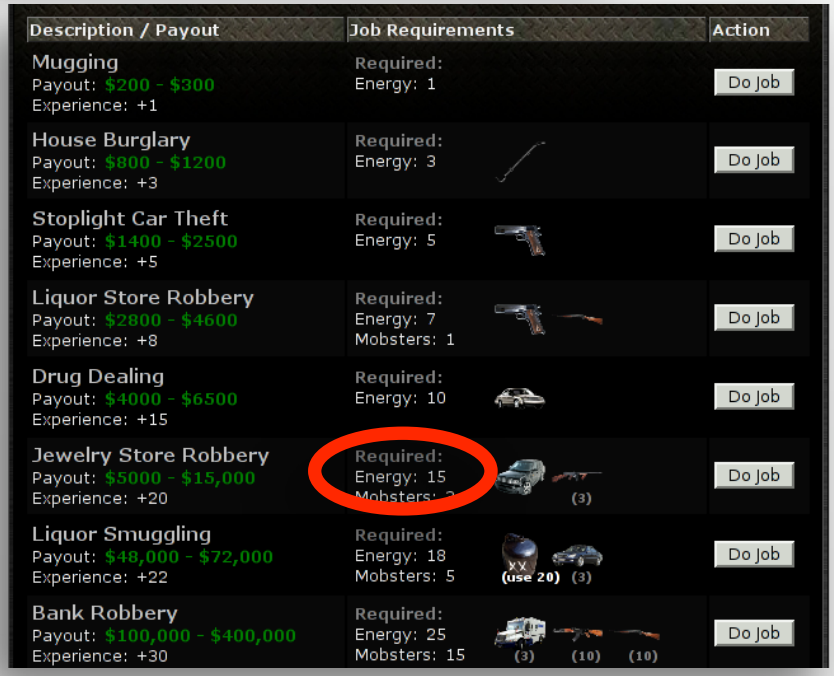
Rules Change Frequently





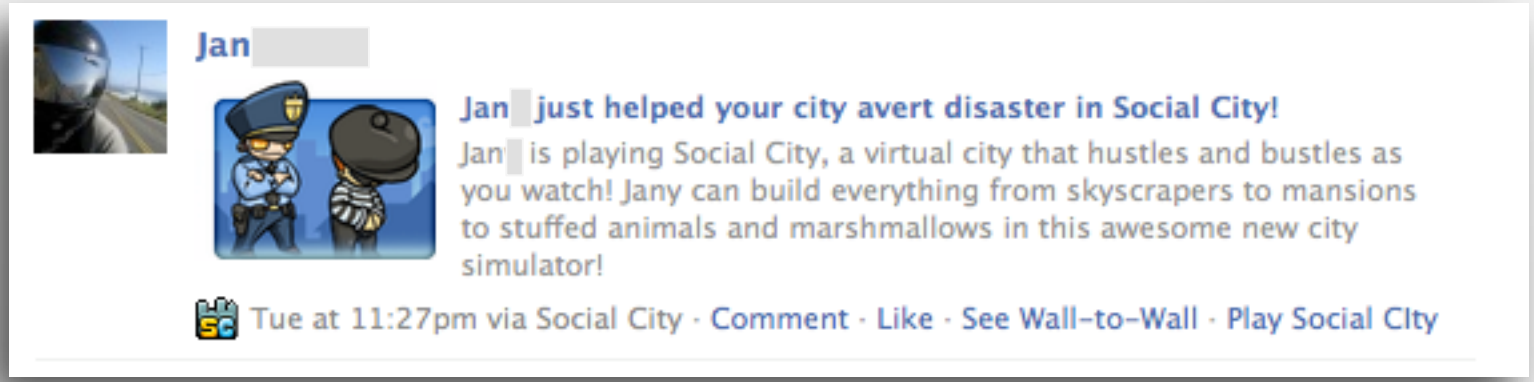
Social Network Platforms Evolve Constantly

Category	Changes	Timing	Last Updated
Communication Channels			
Notifications (Detail)	Application-to-user and user-to-user notifications will be removed, and instead developers will use stream, Inbox, and Email.	Monday, March 1, 2010. (30 days after launch of email permission.)	*February 1, 2010*
Requests (Detail)	Requests will be transitioned to Invites and Inbox.	Early 2010 [30 days after launching new Inbox sharing]	*December 28, 2009*
Invites (Detail)	Invites will be transitioned to a filter in the Inbox.	February 2010	*January 8, 2010*
Inbox (Detail)	Users will be able to share application content with one another via the Inbox.	February 2010	*January 8, 2010*
Stream (Detail)	We are adding internationalization support for stream attachments.	Early 2010	*January 8, 2010*
Application Discovery and Navigation			
Home page: application navigation (Detail)	Application bookmarks will move from the menu bar (bottom of screen) to the left-hand side of home page. Note: We've recently added more content about how bookmarking behavior will work.	February 2010	*January 26, 2010*
Counter (Detail)	Counter will be a notification channel unique to each application, displayed beside individual application bookmarks. Update: The APIs are now live. Start your integrations today, in advance of the user launch.	February 2010	*January 26, 2010*
Dashboards: Applications and Games (Detail)	We are developing new dashboards focused on discovery and re-engagement with games and other applications. Update: The APIs are now live. Start your integrations today, in advance of the user launch.	February 2010	*January 26, 2010*
Profile (Detail)	Application tabs will be the only way to integrate into the Profile.	Early 2010	*December 3, 2009*
Canvas (Detail)	Formatting on canvas pages will change to better highlight an application's brand.	Early 2010	*January 8, 2010*
Photos (Detail)	We're slightly changing a few photo sizes, including the maximum photo size and profile pictures.	Mid January through early 2010	*January 19, 2010*
Upcoming and changing core components			
Open Graph API (Detail)	The Open Graph API will allow any page on the web to have all the features of a Facebook Page – users will be able to become a Fan of the page, it will show up on that user's profile and in search results, and that page will be able to publish stories to the stream of its fans.	Early 2010	*October 28, 2009*

Being Proactive…

Turns Losses Into Wins

Channels Go, Channels Come



Your Work is Never Done

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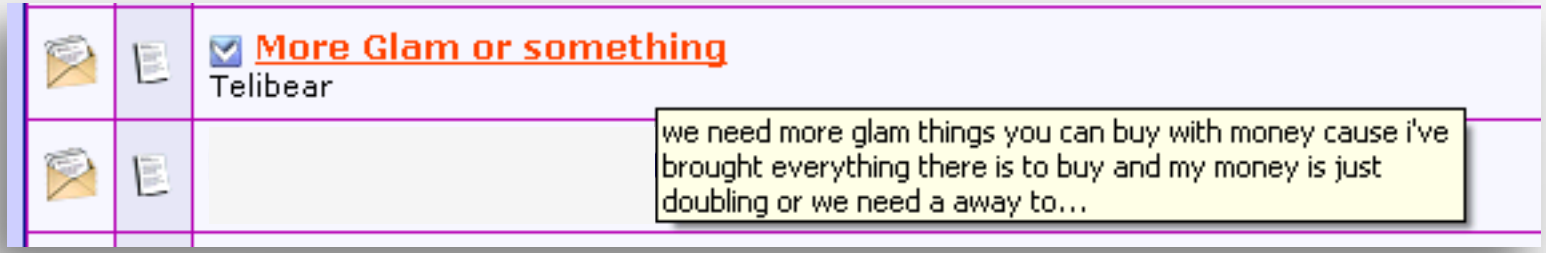
80% of Effort is After Launch

- Ideal user life cycle is "forever"
- Game is live on your server
- Keep players interested with:
  - *Frequent content releases*
  - *Interesting new features*
- Teams must set internal standards for extending games (and fixing issues) and move quickly when retention drops

Users Expect More Stuff to Buy and Do



Seasonal = Awesome!

Focus on Continuous Improvement

1/6/2010 - 1/12/2010	
	comeback u2u newsfeed
	send a puppy
	visiting neighbors / pet care - payout, then pop an invite - ready for final UI by 1/1 now 1/7
	Change invite text "Get friends for your team/build your team"
	send gift button for homescreen
1/13/2010 - 1/19/2010	
	gift modals
	thank neighbors u2u newsfeed
	Stability and Quickplay
	Comeback newsfeed
	Neighbors must be invited
	Invite CTR: Bring this up with Better Copy
	Giftable grenades
	DB Scaling Improvements
	second currency

Closing Thoughts

- Fun is necessary but not sufficient
- Listen to your customers – especially what they do
- Be ready for the platform to change and try to stay in front of the changes
- Know you are on the hook to constantly make your game better and have a plan in hand

Thanks!