

# 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**



**Playdom™**

March 2010 | GDC Players Panel

# What is Playdom?

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



# What is Playdom?

300+ employees in 7 offices worldwide



**Playdom™**

March 2010 | GDC Players Panel



# What is Playdom?

3 of the top 25 apps on Facebook



**Playdom™**

March 2010 | GDC Players Panel

# Who Are Our Users?



Ages 13-80



200+ Countries



Multiple Platforms



**Playdom™**

March 2010 | GDC Players Panel

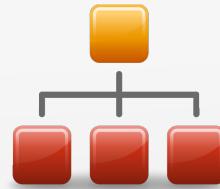
# Games as a Live Service: Going Viral

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

**Cee Cee Boom** is eating an apple at .. APPLE !!!!!  
Yesterday at 3:59pm · Comment · Like

Alexis Ringwald and 2 others like this.

View all 8 comments

**Kristen Katz** Ahhh CC Boom, I love when you flirt with me :)  
8 hours ago

**Cee Cee Boom** KK- Booms banter best.  
Martin- ORDER ME ONE NOW> Here I come.  
6 hours ago

**Logan Eldridge** Send thoughts, prayers and good vibes to my twin sister Mackenzie (in my profile photo). She is in labor!  
Yesterday at 8:53am · Comment · Like

Annie Hsu and 7 others like this.

View all 7 comments

**Logan Eldridge** It's a boy!  
9 hours ago

**Angelo Pagano** CONGRATULATIONS UNCLE LOGAN!!! now don't go spoiling him just because he's a boy  
6 hours ago

**Andrew Winton** was tagged in a photo.  
**overdue summer 2009**



Yesterday at 1:13pm · Comment · Like

**Sarah Doane** Urban Daddy Holiday soiree  
**Mobile Uploads**



11 hours ago via Facebook Mobile · Comment · Like · Share

**Olga Gashinsky** I like the outfit!  
9 hours ago

**Adam Melvin** work it!  
9 hours ago

## Players' feeds

**Roger** Your stinky seaweed is really destroying property values in the neighborhood!  
**Roger just helped you on your Tiki Farm Island!**  
A big tsunami washed up stinky seaweed on your island, and they hauled it away for you!  
February 15 at 11:47pm via Tiki Farm · Comment · Like · Play Tiki Farm

**Scott** Cats are city disasters, dontchaknow.  
**Scott just helped your city avert disaster in Social City!**  
Scott is playing Social City, a virtual city that hustles and bustles as you watch! Scott can build everything from skyscrapers to mansions to stuffed animals and marshmallows in this awesome new city simulator!  
Yesterday at 11:15am via Social City · Comment · Like · Play Social City

**Steven** There are seven euphemisms hidden in this wall post. Can you find them all?  
**Steven has found a friendly street walker!**  
On the way back from the Smuggle Weapons-grade Plutonium job, Steven found a friendly street walker looking for company!  
February 19 at 10:56am via Mobsters 2: Vendetta · Comment · Like · Give her a home

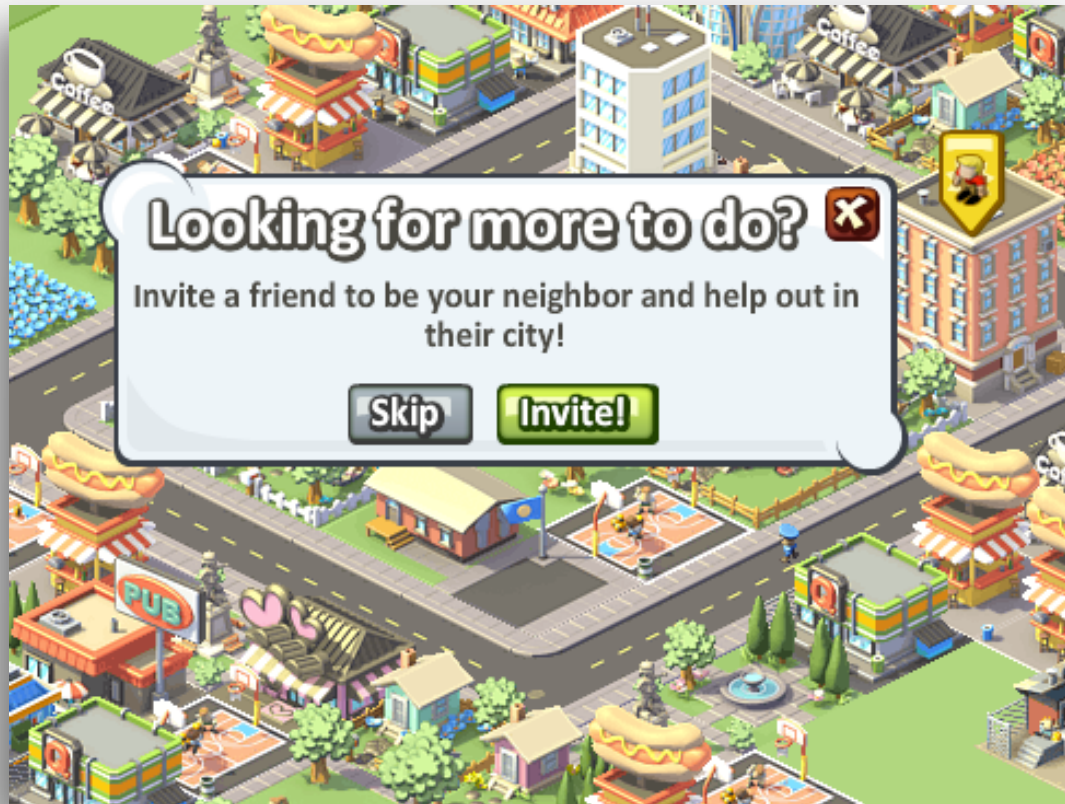
**Roy** Lol :)  
February 19 at 11:39am

**Claus** If you count the word "Vendetta", I think there may be eight :)  
February 19 at 11:58am

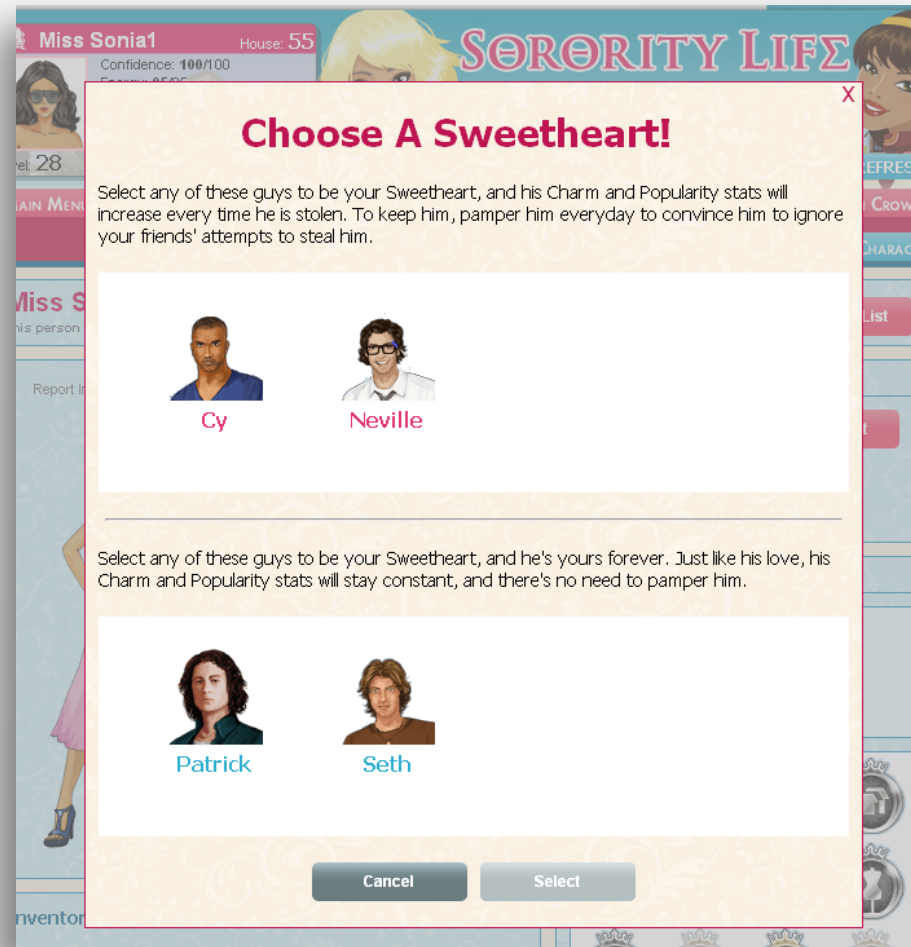
**Raymond** I found her a place on my farm.  
February 19 at 3:14pm



# Moving Beyond Spam

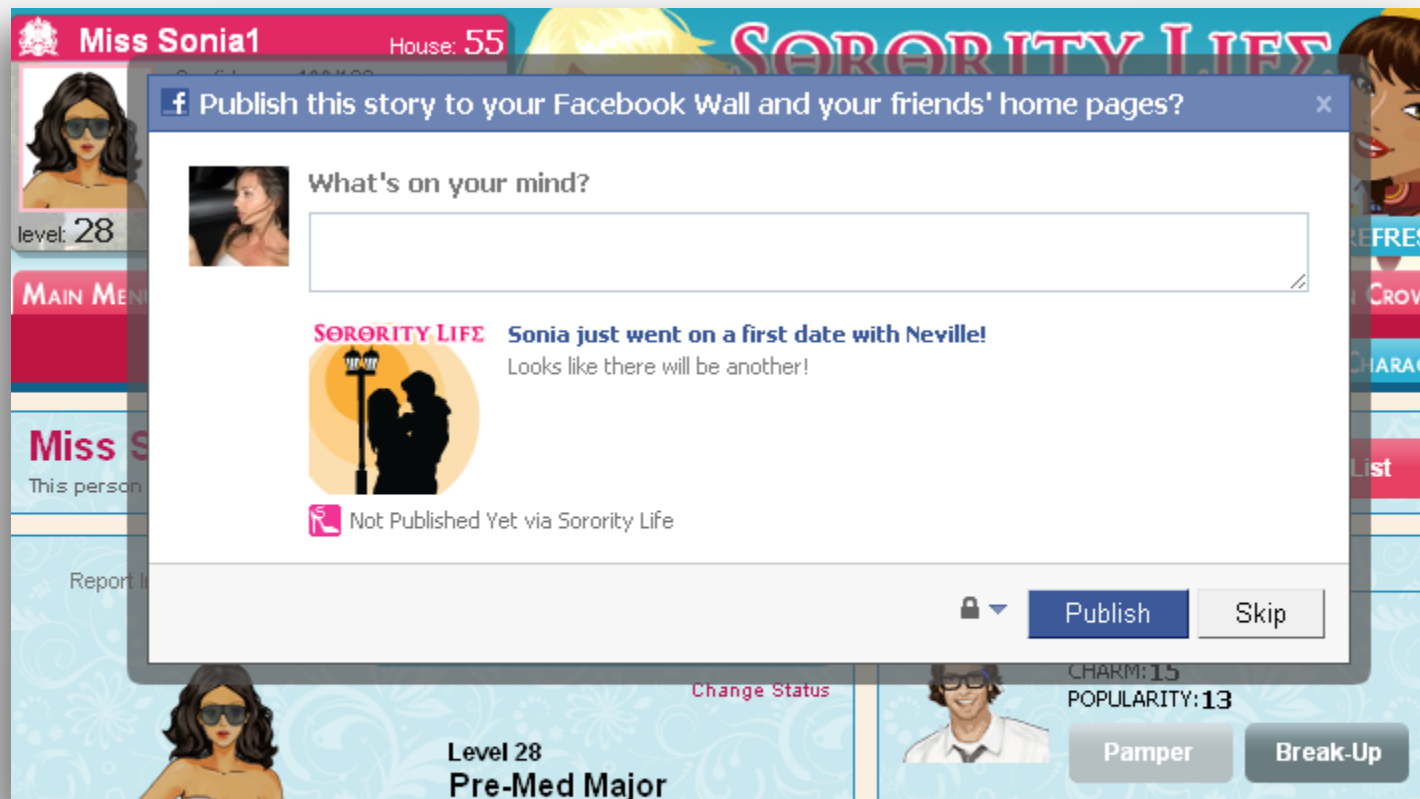


# Social Features are the Best Viral Features





# Social Features are the Best Viral Features



# Social Features are the Best Viral Features

**Miss Sonia1** House: 55  
Confidence: 100/100  
Energy: 94/95  
Stamina: 5/5  
Cash: \$1,296,330  
level: 28  
Influence: 4883/4950  
My Skills

**SORORITY LIFE**

MAIN MENU | Socialize | JOBS | BANK | HOUSE MOM | FIGHT | GLAM | SPA | MY HOUSE | MY SELF | MY STYLE

**Honey**  
This person is in your house.

Attack | Slap | Add to Burn List | Ask Friends to Attack

Report Inappropriate Name

**Honey's Sweetheart**  
DANTE  
CHARM: 26  
POPULARITY: 33

**Level 67 Business Major**

Career Stats	Value
Events Organized	997
Burn List Grattitudes	0

Fight Stats	Value
Fights Won	786
Fights Lost	365
Depressions	4
Girls Destroyed	2

Vote for her Style!  
Votes received today: 1

Facebook icon Publish this story to your Facebook Wall and your friends' home pages?

What's on your mind?

Sorry sister... he's just too cute!

Squeeze in Sorority Life!

Publish Skip

**SORORITY LIFE**  
Sonia just stole Jessica [redacted]'s main squeeze in Sorority Life!

Yesterday at 8:54pm via Sorority Life · Comment · Like · See her Sweetheart

**Shannon** [redacted] take that bitch

**SORORITY LIFE**  
Shannon just stole Denise [redacted]'s main squeeze in Sorority Life!

January 17 at 8:01pm via Sorority Life · Comment · Like · See her Sweetheart

Crystal [redacted] likes this.

**Devon** [redacted] Cat fight!  
January 18 at 8:31am

**Troy** [redacted] lol  
January 18 at 10:42am

Write a comment...



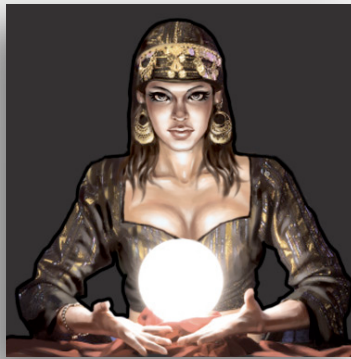
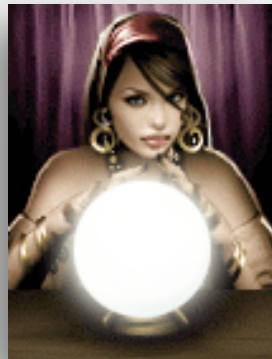
# Optimize and Renew

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



# Optimize and Renew

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

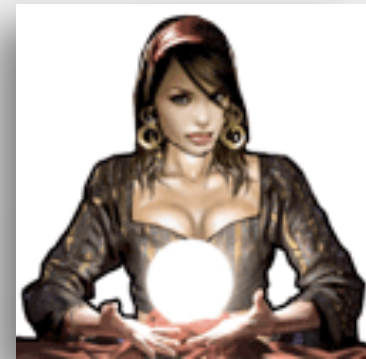
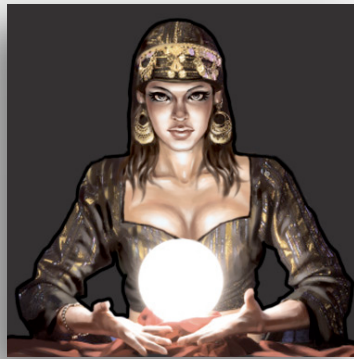
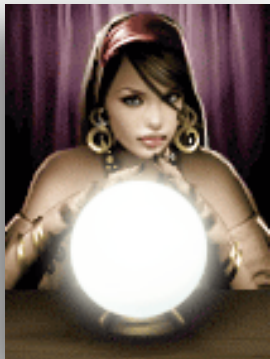




# Optimize and Renew

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

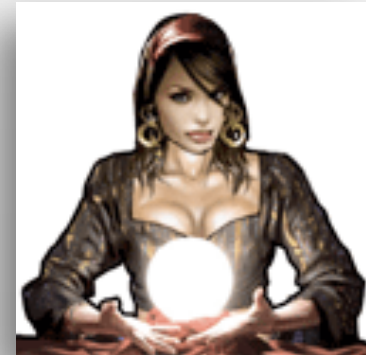
**Winner!**



# Optimize and Renew

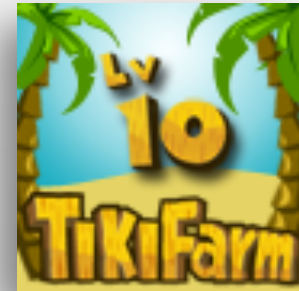
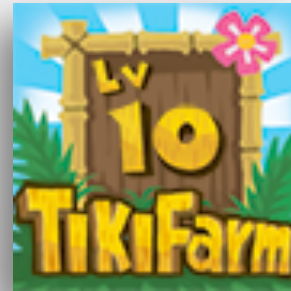
Of the 4 fortune tellers, which do you think works best?

**Winner!**



# Optimize and Renew

Winner!



# A Bit of Theory

$$K = (\text{infection rate}) * (\text{conversion rate})$$

[summed across all channels]

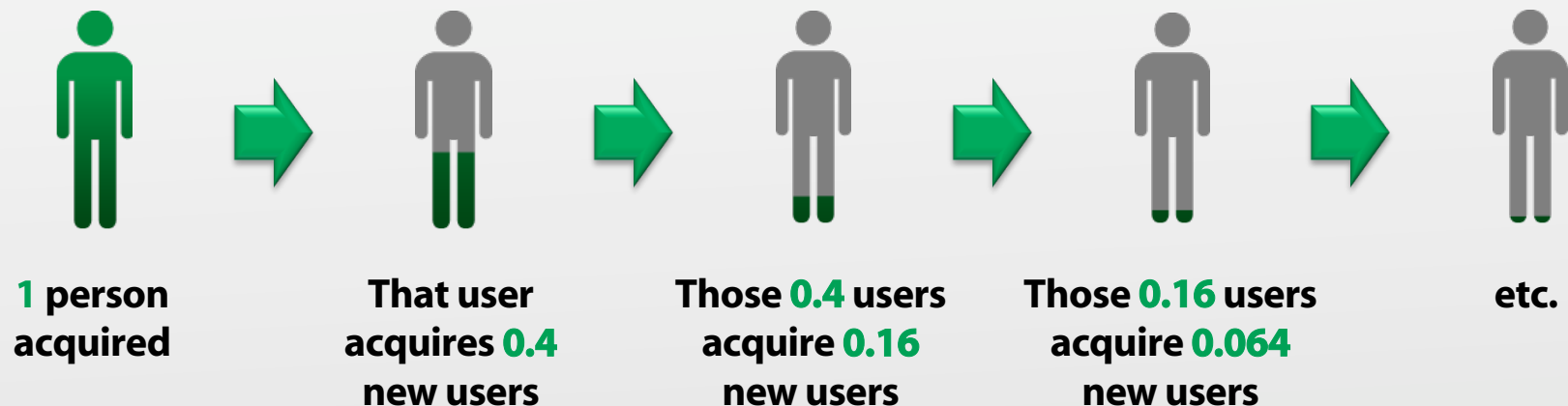




# Example:

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

$$K = \frac{(\text{infection rate})}{(\text{conversion rate})} = (4) * (10\%) = \mathbf{0.4}$$



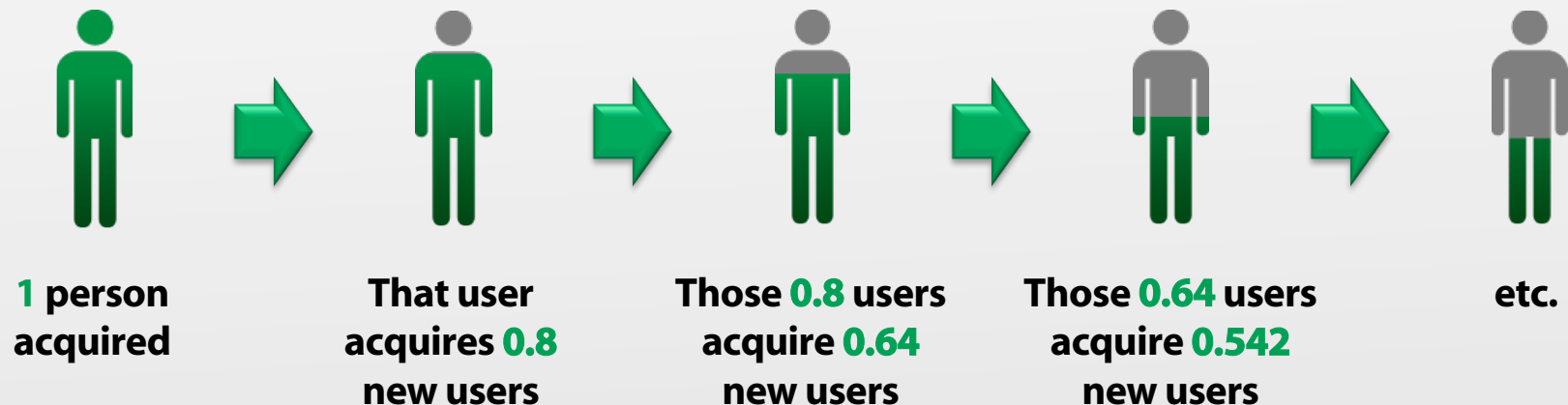
Total: **1.67**, or **0.67** new users from virality



## Example 2:

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

$$K = \frac{(\text{infection rate})}{(\text{conversion rate})} = (8) * (10\%) = 0.8$$

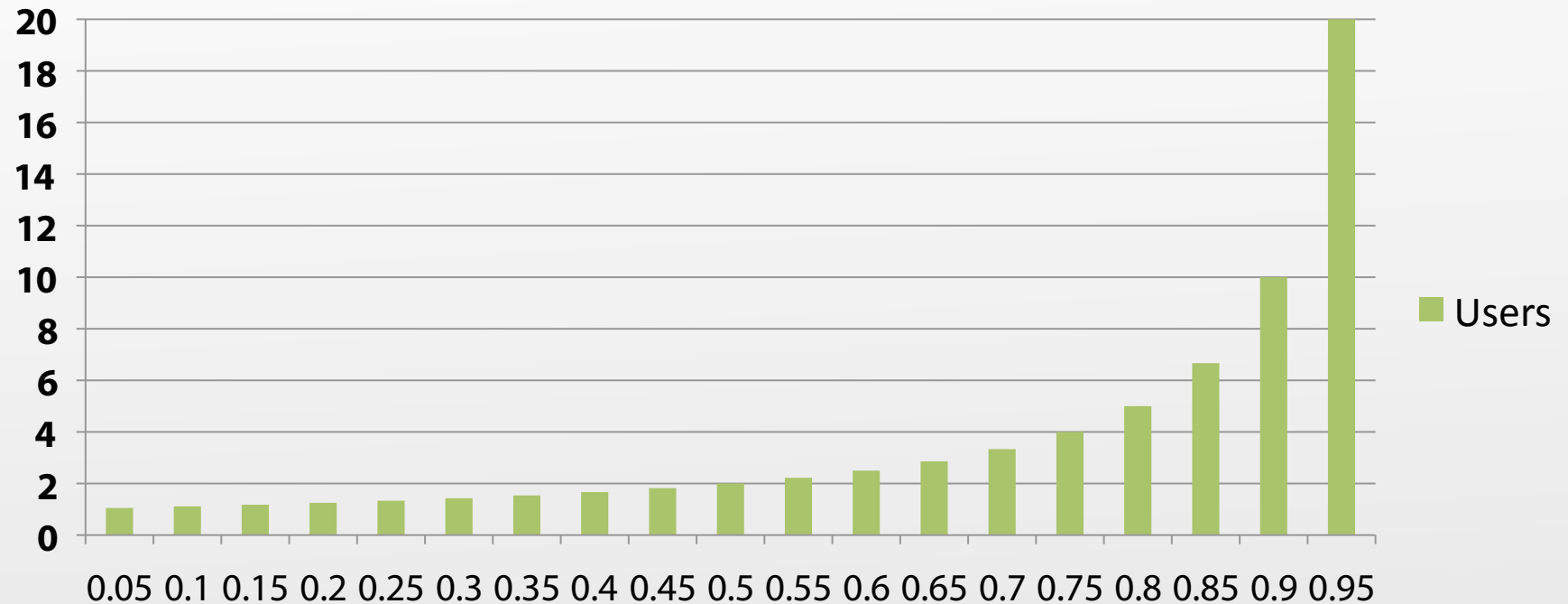


Total: 5, or 4 new users from virality



# Let's see this in a graph:

K Table



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



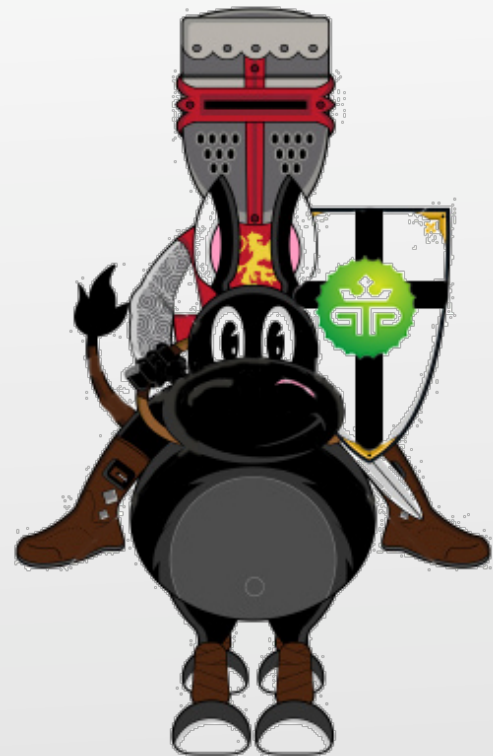
Platforms



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?

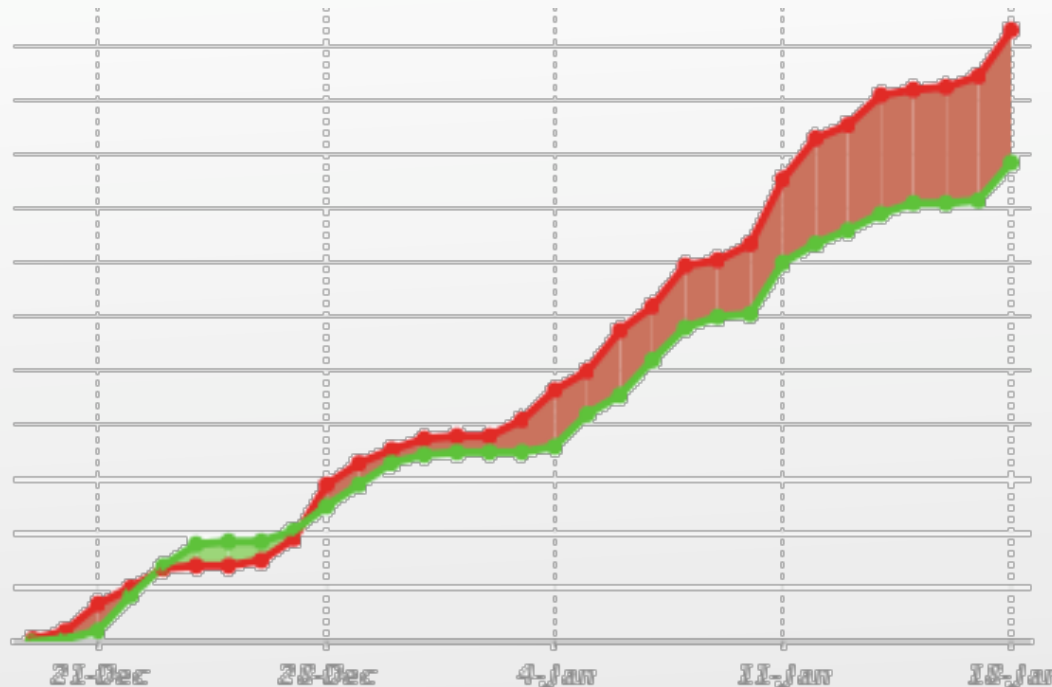


# Players as QA

- **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

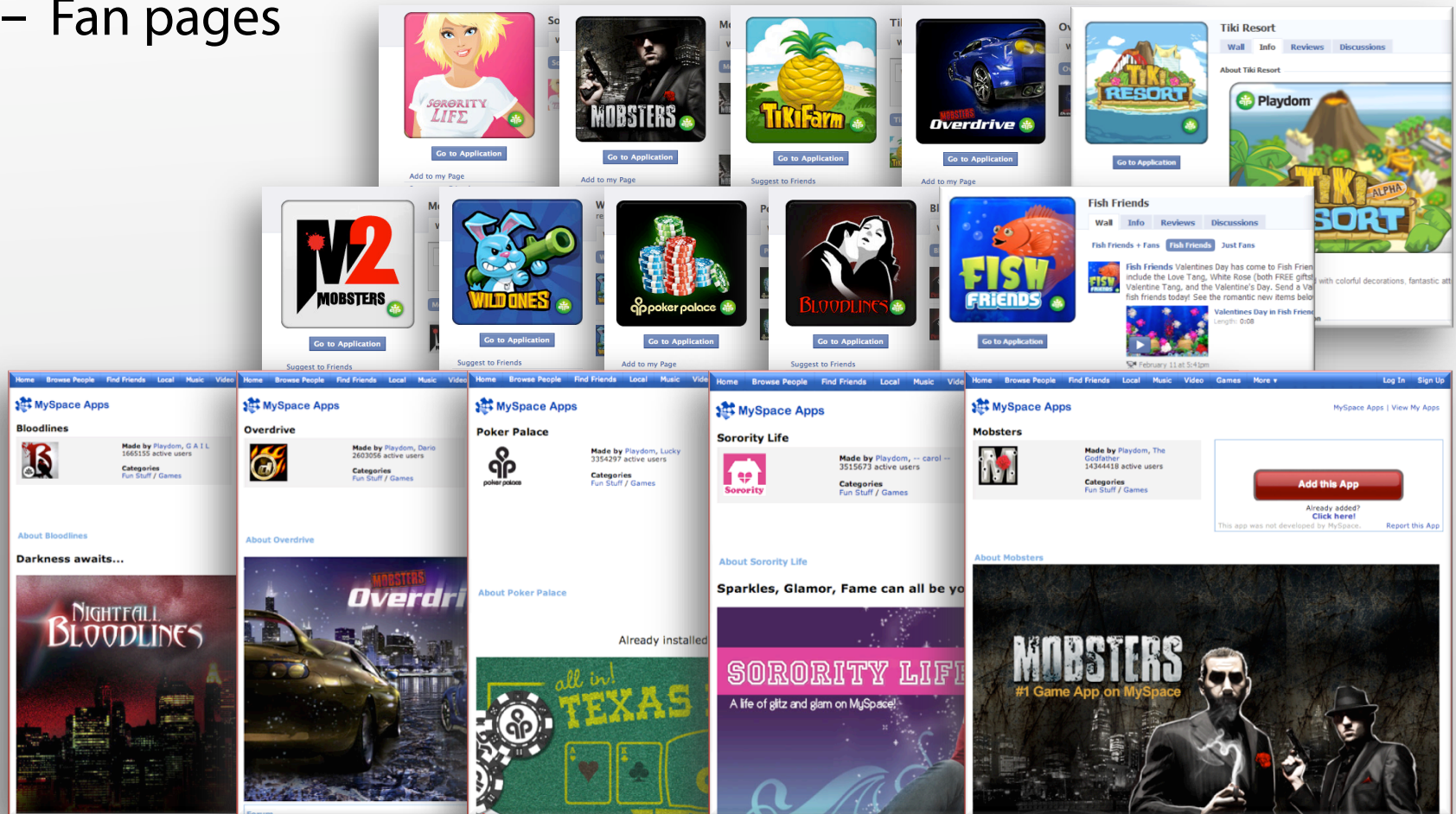


- User feedback vs. disruptions
- Bugs vs. features
- Users are the key to game evolution



# The Toolbox

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



**Playdom™**

March 2010 | GDC Players Panel



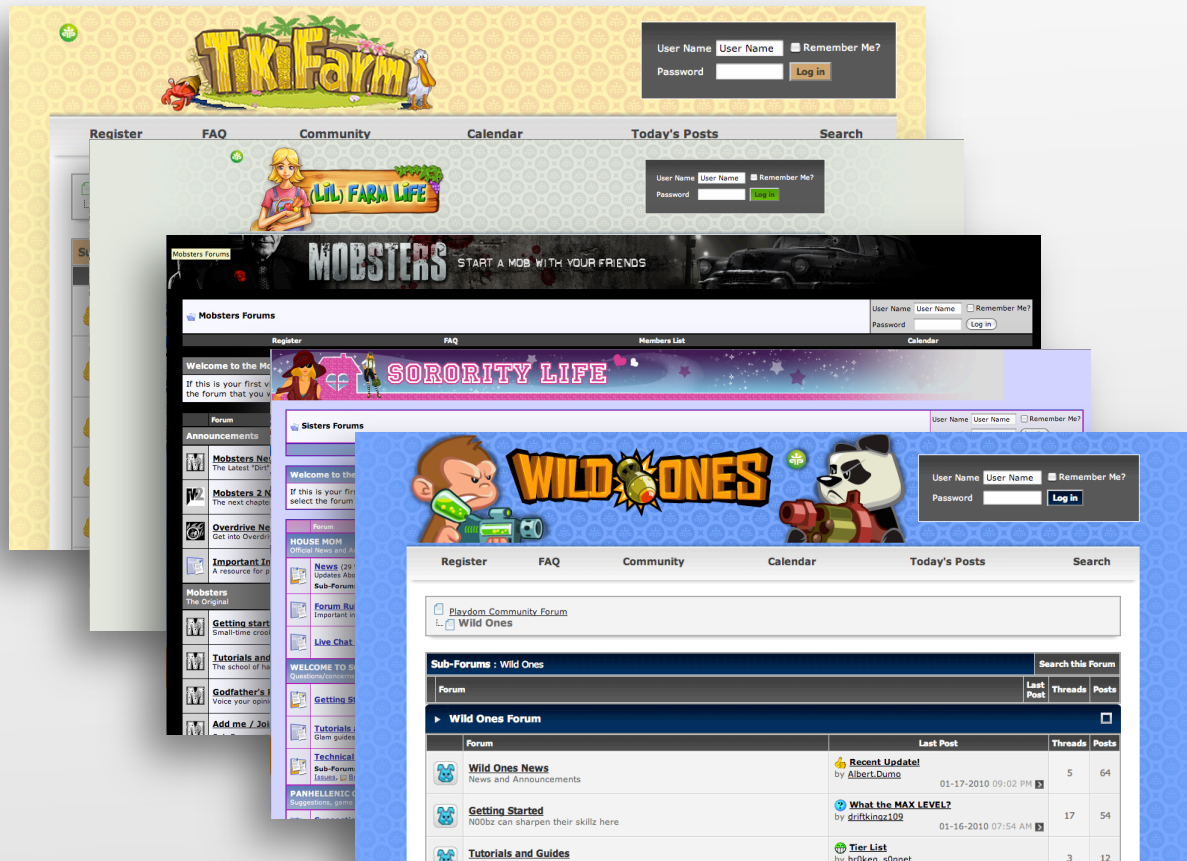
# The Toolbox

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



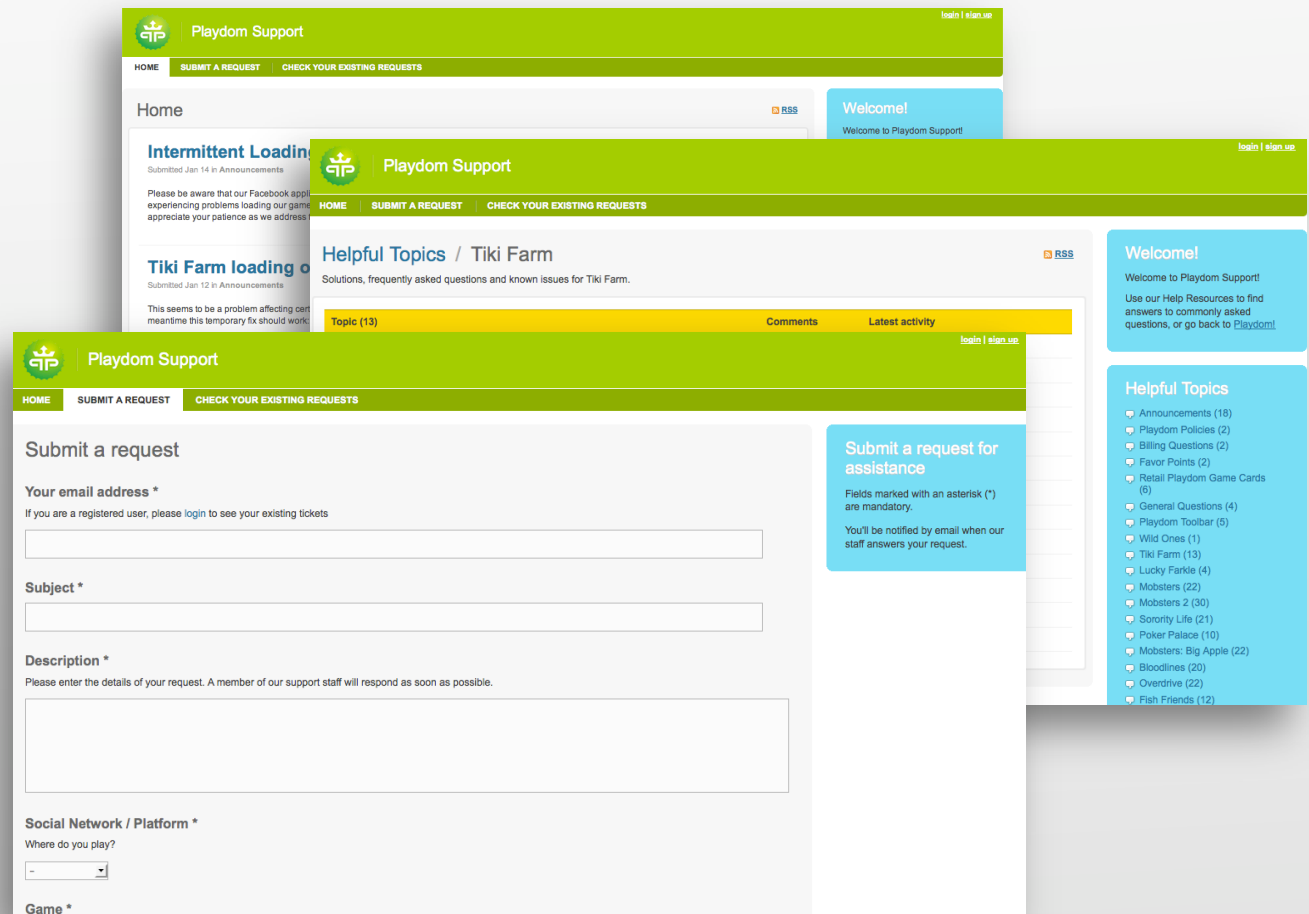
# The Toolbox

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



Playdom™

March 2010 | GDC Players Panel



# Getting Your Hands Dirty



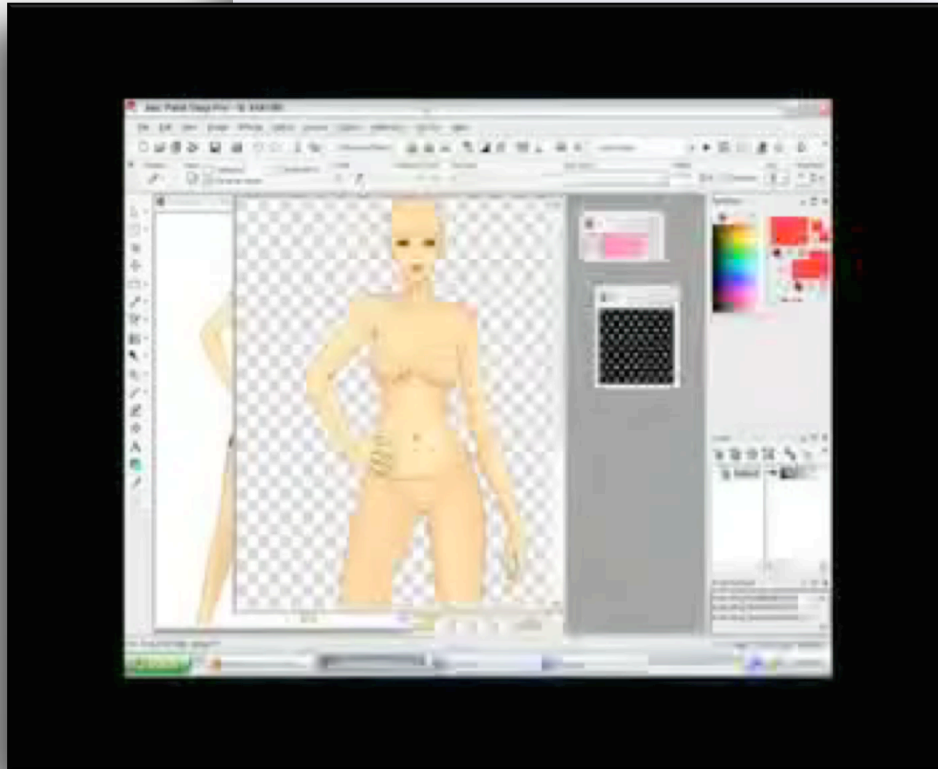


# And the Winners Are...



# Not Just About Winning

## Paint Shop Pro Tutorial: Sorority Life Contest Designs



make 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](#)

It's not a tutorial for it. It may have a lot of the same features though. 😊

look 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](#)

shades, opacity, and shortcuts:

[watch?v=Fqu3lRSzsDA](#)

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

rules:

[at them here rather than PMing me.](#)

everyone 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.

make that make them in a different way. **Have fun!**

designs 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)



**Playdom™**

March 2010 | GDC Players Panel

# User Generated Content

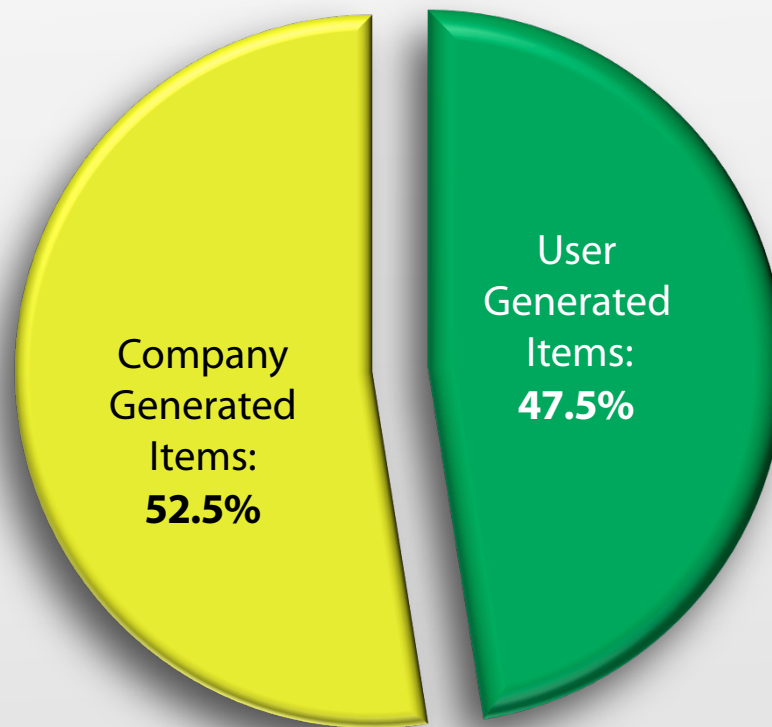
- **Users involvement on product level**
- **Sorority Life design contests**
  - Increases engagement and reengagement
  - Gives users a bigger voice in game direction
  - Translates to happier users, better product, higher revenues



# 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



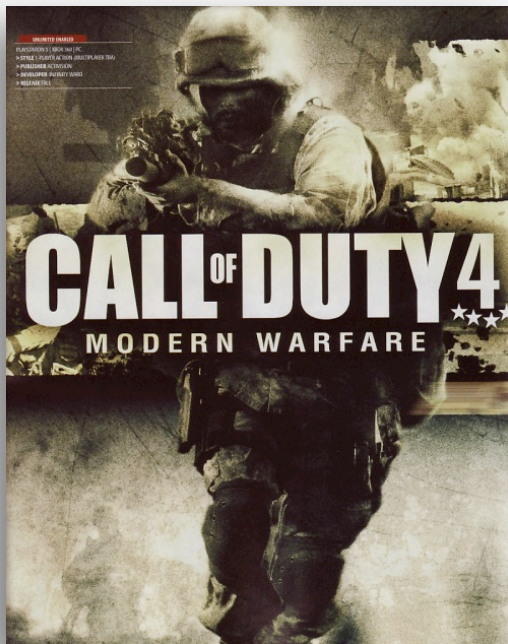
New Concepts



Player Experience



# Social Game Design



≠



# 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?

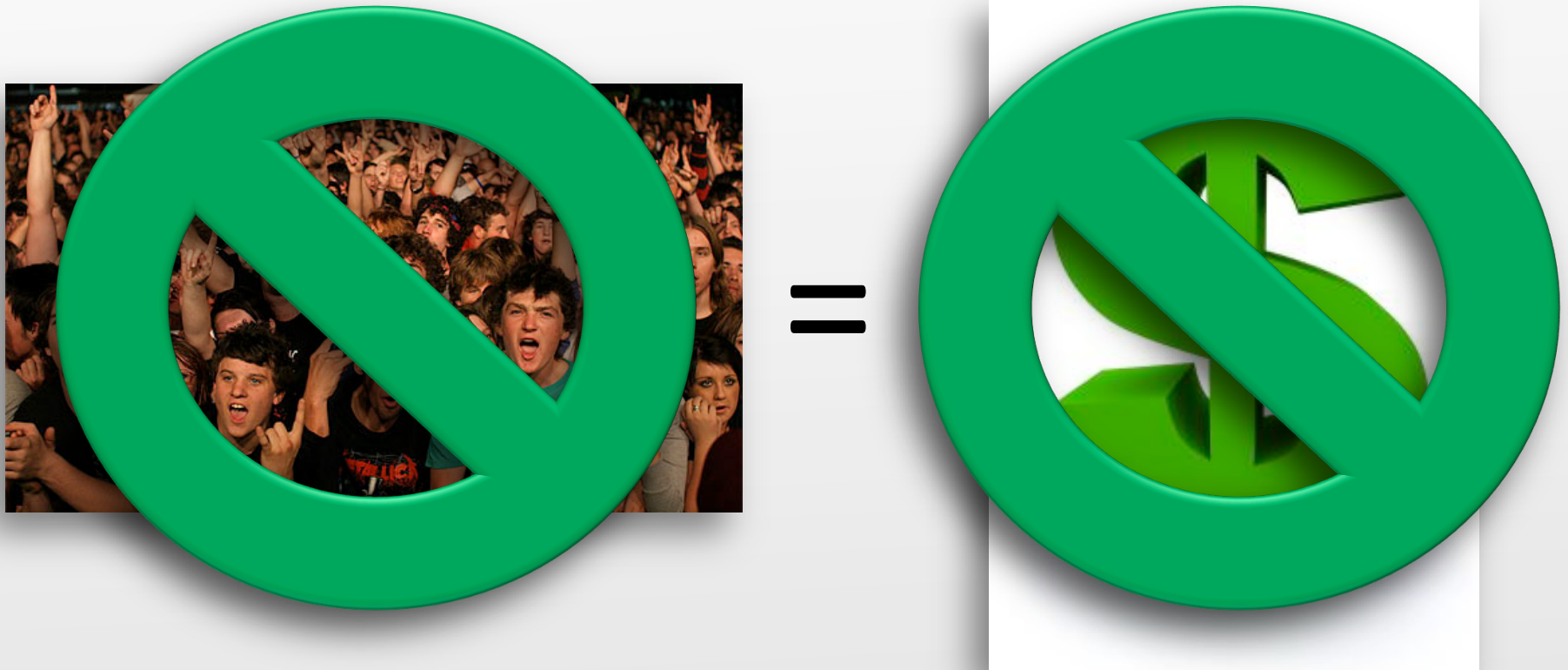


=





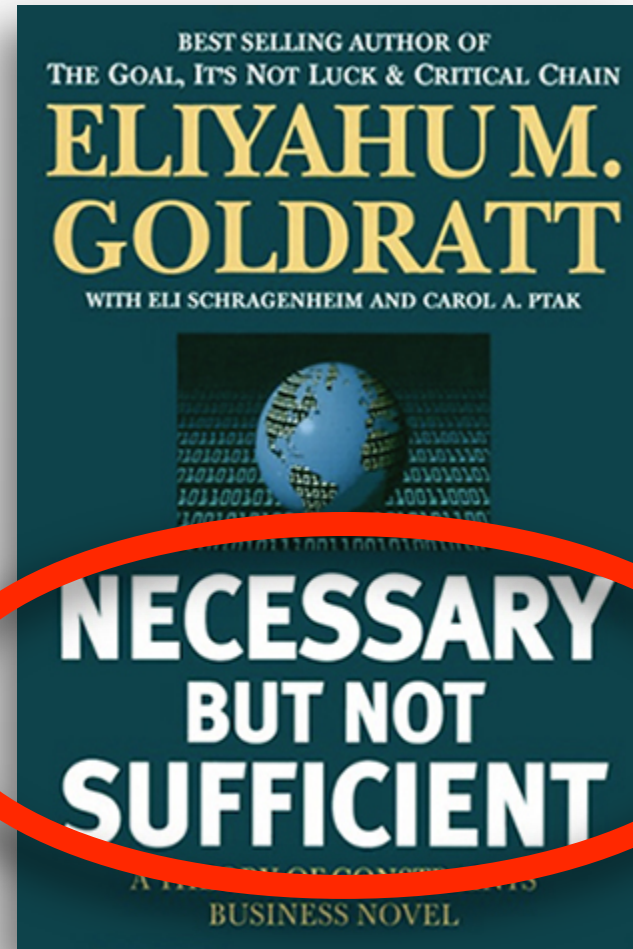
# What About Fun?



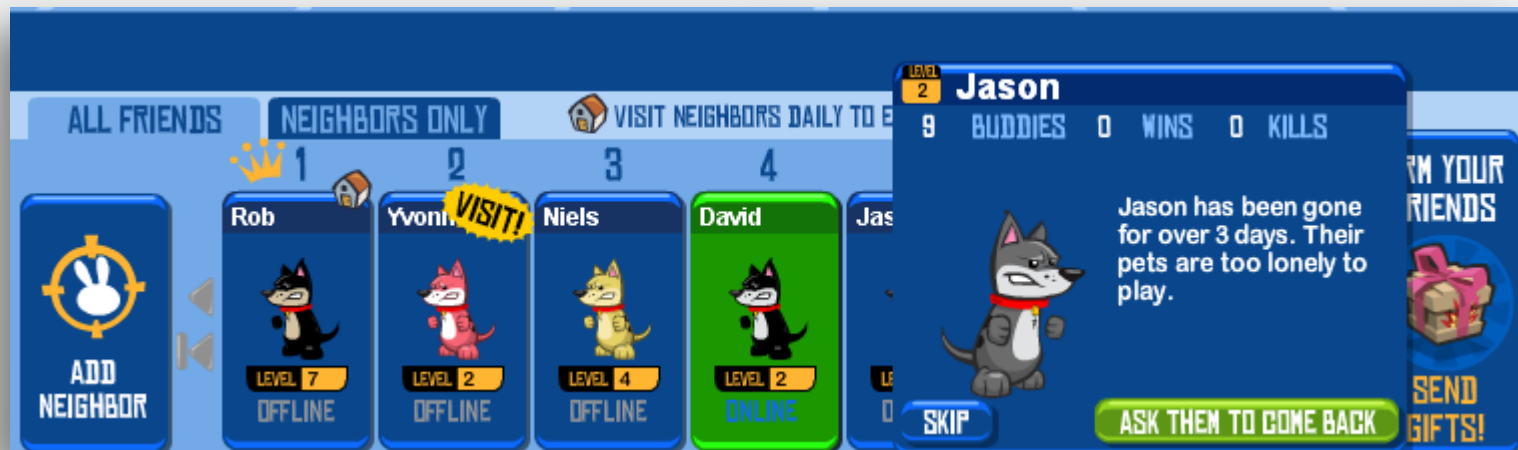
# BUT...



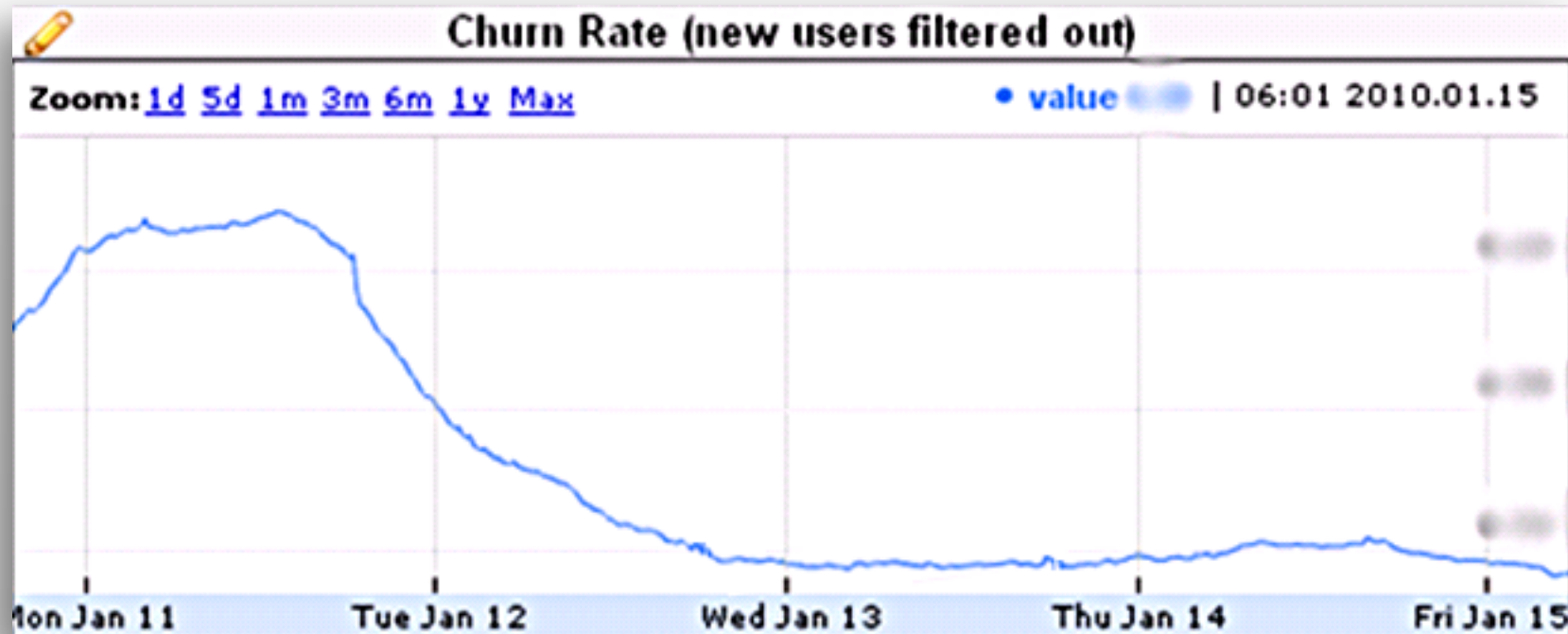
=



# Designing To Shape User Behavior



# Designing To Shape User Behavior



# Designing In Partnership With Your Customers



≠



# 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)









# Users Will Give You Good Ideas

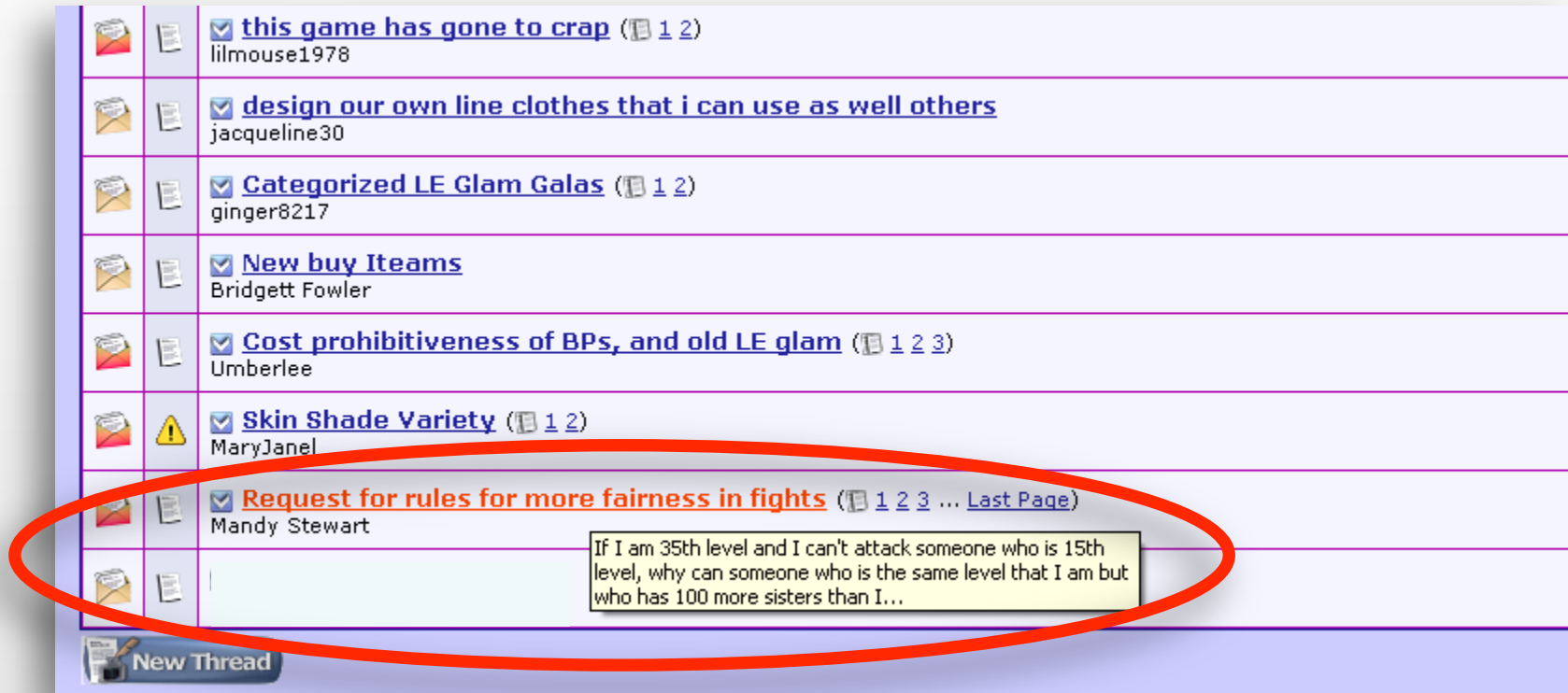


A screenshot of a forum thread with 18 posts. A red oval highlights the post by Violet Vivian, which reads: "Give us a notice on who stole our bf!". The thread includes various suggestions and discussions related to game mechanics and user experience.

	<a href="#">Grammy Red Carpet Dresses of 2010 for Glam</a> jen53190
	<a href="#">Upgrade myspace, i hate facebook!!!</a> (1 2) TREVSGRL
	Moved: <a href="#">Thoughts on the Burn List</a> Olive
	<a href="#">Unlimited banking</a> (1 2 3) dakota_giftedgal
	<a href="#">Suggestion for rival list</a> PolarIceAK
	<a href="#">Next Design Contest: Accessories</a> (1 2 3) ginger8217
	<a href="#">buy glam</a> Melisande da Mymeri
	Poll: <a href="#">Voting from the New SB Sorority Board - New Suggestion</a> (1 2) Antares
	<a href="#">No double prizes</a> marielocooper
	<a href="#">BP's for fortune</a> (1 2) marielocooper
	<a href="#">Give us a notice on who stole our bf!</a> Violet Vivian
	<a href="#">Mell32</a> shaybabe97
	<a href="#">gifting glam</a> DessertDragon
	<a href="#">In Crowd List Groups by Level</a> SIN Sational
	<a href="#">Create a fairer system for house size and fighting</a> (1 2 3 ... Last Page) InspiredPen
	<a href="#">Fighting a Sister</a> Moe8
	<a href="#">Help! I just want to rearrange/organize my glam!</a> mpaulsen7
	<a href="#">Sending out bonus Moccachinos</a>



# And Bad Ones



# 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?

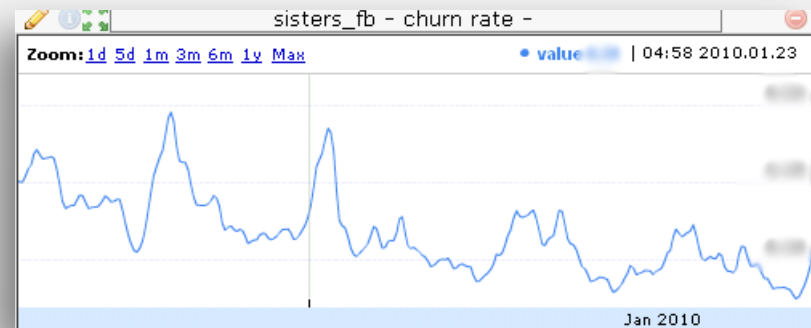
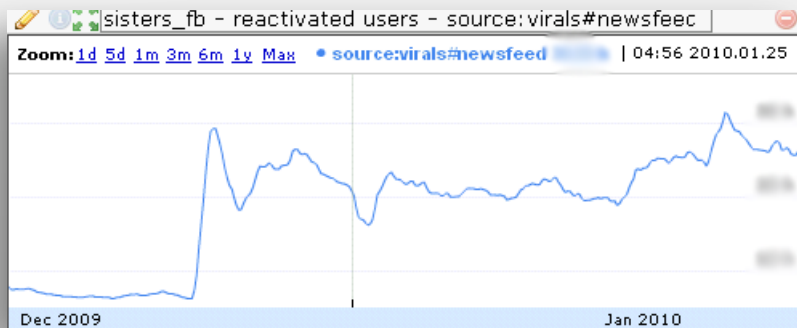
- Defining your game's vision
- Telling you how to reach a broader market
- Making your game more casual
- Making your game more approachable, elegant, and streamlined



# Actions Speak Louder Than Words

		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Get Rid of Pop-ups, Please!</b> 4\$Beales
		

After every banking of money, after every victory in attack, after every single little thing, come on! Can you PLEASE get rid of all the unnecessary...



So, who is right?



# Designing for an Unstable Platform



≠



# Rules Change Frequently



Group: **Stop forcing me to "Invite 20 Friends"!!** [View Group](#)  
 Network: Global [Join Group](#)  
 Size: 334,791 members  
 Type: Common Interest - Friends  
 New: [9,572 More Members](#)



Group: **No, I will NOT invite 20 friends just to add your application!** [View Group](#)  
 Network: Global [Join Group](#)  
 Size: 91,379 members  
 Type: Internet & Technology - Websites  
 New: [1,518 More Members](#), [6 Board Topics](#), [28 Wall Posts](#)  
 Updated: [Description](#), [News](#)

**Notifications** [See All](#)

Someone likes your status. 57 minutes ago

Someone likes your link. about an hour ago

Someone won a fight with your help. Click here to claim your reward. 3 hours ago

**Boston deal of the day:**  
 50% Off any Four Zumba, Morning Stretch, Hatha Yoga, Jazz, Tap, Modern, or Ballet Classes at StudioDCFA (Get daily alerts | More info) 7 hours ago

Someone gave you an Energy Pack in Mafia Wars. Click here and claim your Energy Bonus! 9 hours ago

Chat (36)

Description / Payout	Job Requirements	Action
<b>Mugging</b> Payout: <b>\$200 - \$300</b> Experience: +1	Required: Energy: 1	<a href="#">Do Job</a>
<b>House Burglary</b> Payout: <b>\$800 - \$1200</b> Experience: +3	Required: Energy: 3	<a href="#">Do Job</a>
<b>Stoplight Car Theft</b> Payout: <b>\$1400 - \$2500</b> Experience: +5	Required: Energy: 5	<a href="#">Do Job</a>
<b>Liquor Store Robbery</b> Payout: <b>\$2800 - \$4600</b> Experience: +8	Required: Energy: 7 Mobsters: 1	<a href="#">Do Job</a>
<b>Drug Dealing</b> Payout: <b>\$4000 - \$6500</b> Experience: +15	Required: Energy: 10	<a href="#">Do Job</a>
<b>Jewelry Store Robbery</b> Payout: <b>\$5000 - \$15,000</b> Experience: +20	Required: Energy: 15 Mobsters: 2	<a href="#">Do Job</a>
<b>Liquor Smuggling</b> Payout: <b>\$48,000 - \$72,000</b> Experience: +22	Required: Energy: 18 Mobsters: 5	<a href="#">Do Job</a>
<b>Bank Robbery</b> Payout: <b>\$100,000 - \$400,000</b> Experience: +30	Required: Energy: 25 Mobsters: 15	<a href="#">Do Job</a>





# Social Network Platforms

## Evolve Constantly

Category	Changes	Timing	Last Updated
<b>Communication Channels</b>			
Notifications ( <a href="#">Detail</a> )	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 <a href="#">email permission</a> .)	<i>February 1, 2010</i>
Requests ( <a href="#">Detail</a> )	Requests will be transitioned to Invites and Inbox.	Early 2010 (30 days after launching new Inbox sharing)	<i>December 28, 2009</i>
Invites ( <a href="#">Detail</a> )	Invites will be transitioned to a filter in the Inbox.	February 2010	<i>January 8, 2010</i>
Inbox ( <a href="#">Detail</a> )	Users will be able to share application content with one another via the Inbox.	February 2010	<i>January 8, 2010</i>
Stream ( <a href="#">Detail</a> )	We are adding <a href="#">internationalization</a> support for stream attachments.	Early 2010	<i>January 8, 2010</i>
<b>Application Discovery and Navigation</b>			
Home page: application navigation ( <a href="#">Detail</a> )	Application bookmarks will move from the menu bar (bottom of screen) to the left-hand side of home page. <b>Note:</b> We've recently added more content about how bookmarking behavior will work.	February 2010	<i>January 26, 2010</i>
Counter ( <a href="#">Detail</a> )	Counter will be a notification channel unique to each application, displayed beside individual application bookmarks. <b>Update:</b> The APIs are now live <a href="#"></a> . Start your integrations today, in advance of the user launch.	February 2010	<i>January 26, 2010</i>
Dashboards: Applications and Games ( <a href="#">Detail</a> )	We are developing new dashboards focused on discovery and re-engagement with games and other applications. <b>Update:</b> The APIs are now live <a href="#"></a> . Start your integrations today, in advance of the user launch.	February 2010	<i>January 26, 2010</i>
Profile ( <a href="#">Detail</a> )	Application tabs will be the only way to integrate into the Profile.	Early 2010	<i>December 3, 2009</i>
Canvas ( <a href="#">Detail</a> )	Formatting on canvas pages will change to better highlight an application's brand.	Early 2010	<i>January 8, 2010</i>
Photos ( <a href="#">Detail</a> )	We're slightly changing a few photo sizes, including the maximum photo size and profile pictures.	Mid January through early 2010	<i>January 19, 2010</i>
<b>Upcoming and changing core components</b>			
Open Graph API ( <a href="#">Detail</a> )	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	<i>October 28, 2009</i>



# Being Proactive...



# Turns Losses Into Wins



# Channels Go, Channels Come



Jan



Jan just helped your city avert disaster in Social City!  
Jan is playing Social City, a virtual city that hustles and bustles as you watch! Jany can build everything from skyscrapers to mansions to stuffed animals and marshmallows in this awesome new city simulator!

 Tue at 11:27pm via Social City · [Comment](#) · [Like](#) · [See Wall-to-Wall](#) · [Play Social City](#)



# Your Work is Never Done



≠









# 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

		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>More Glam or something</b> Telibear
		<div>we need more glam things you can buy with money cause i've brought everything there is to buy and my money is just doubling or we need a away to...</div>





# Seasonal = Awesome!

**Divanarama** House: 184  
Confidence: 108/108  
Energy: 90/90  
Stamina: 3/3  
Cash: \$651,441  
level: 23  
Influence: 3398/3450  
My Skills

**SORORITY LIFE**

REFRESH

MAIN MENU | SOCIALIZE | JOBS | BANK | HOUSE MOM | FIGHT | GLAM | SPA | MY HOUSE | MY SELF | MY STYLE | CATWALK | IN CROWD | ?

WARDROBE | SWEETHEART | KEEPSAKES | GIFTING

### Wardrobe

Total Upkeep: \$1,963

Sisters never fight alone! When you take on a rival, your sisters will outfit themselves in whatever accessories, outfits, rides, and boyfriends you own to boost your charm and popularity. The results of an attack will be calculated based on how many sisters you have in your sorority, and what they are wearing.

Each sister can have 1 accessory, wear 1 outfit, drive 1 ride, and have 1 boyfriend.

Recruit More Sisters!

#### LIMITED EDITION

Item	CHARM	POPULARITY	OWNED
RED VALENTINE'S DAY GOWN	17	35	0
MODE: BRUNETTE TWISTED CHIGNON	14	20	0
VALENTINE LINGERIE	34	16	0
80'S VALENTINE OUTFIT	16	34	0
JENNIFER NETTLES RED CARPET DRESS	16	31	0



# 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!



**Playdom™**

March 2010 | GDC Players Panel