



iPAD GAMING

SUMMIT

Embracing Mobile Gaming: Striving to Ship
Every Three Months

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GDC
Online

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Who am I?



Our portfolio



Newtoy Inc

- Formed in Fall 2008
- Based in McKinney, Tx
- Over 2 million DAUs
- More than 1.6 billion ad impressions a month
- 40% of Words With Friends players bring up the game 10+ times a day



Overview

- The mobile world
- A fresh start
- The teams
- The games
- The processes



The mobile world



A new space

The mobile world

- Large and varied user base
- Devices that are always with you
- Users that are always connected
- New methods of interactions and features
- Small and concise experiences

Embrace these strengths!



Game development

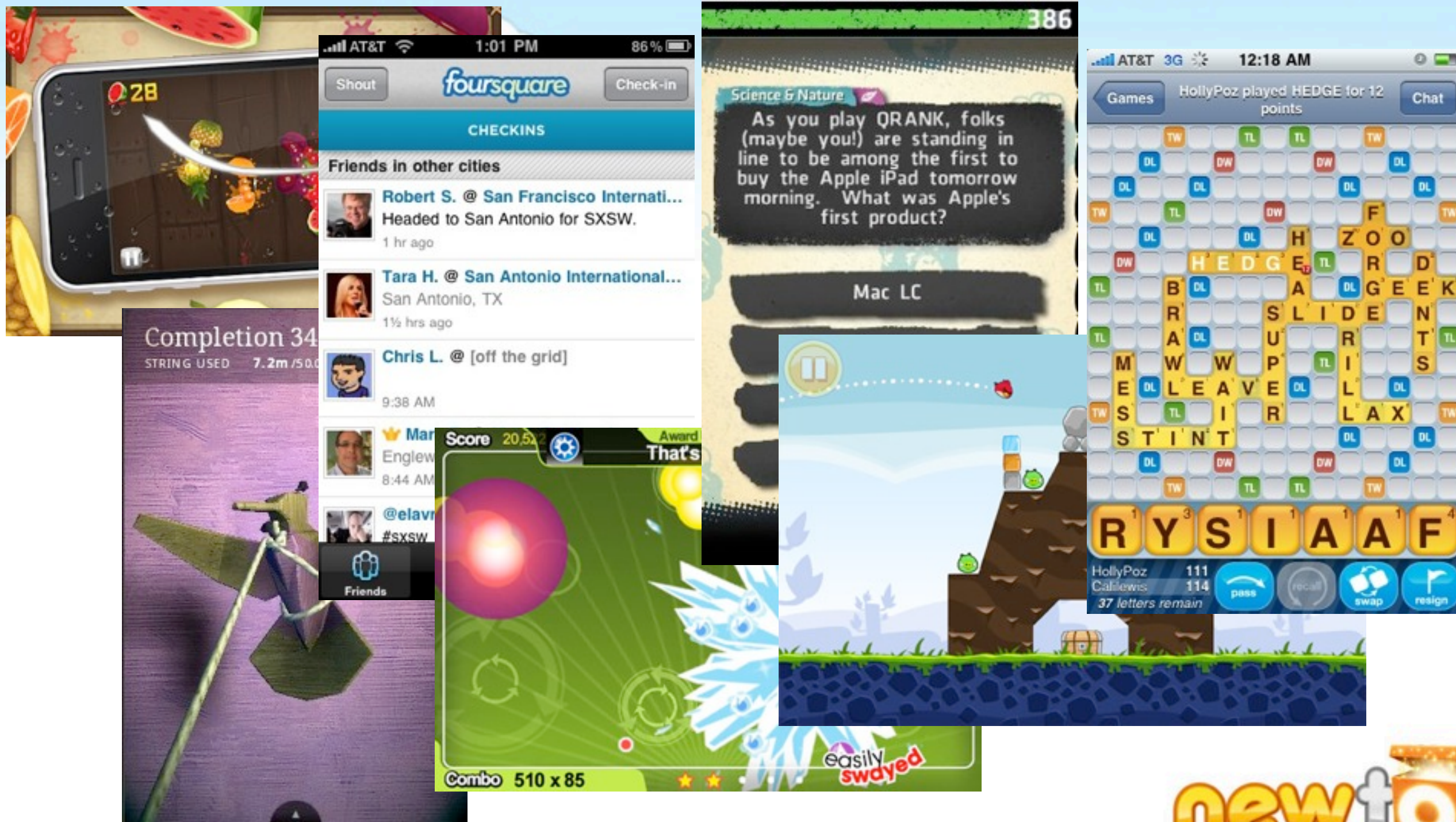
The mobile world

- This is fantastic!
- Environment for every kind of idea
- Extremely low barrier to entry
- Small, agile teams thrive
- Easy to patch, update and grow
- Rebirth of indie development and experimentation



New ideas!

The mobile world



A fresh start



The problems

A fresh start

- Massive time and financial investments
- Large team sizes
- Complex games
- Difficult to be agile and flexible
- Scheduling slips have a large impact
- Crunch is widely accepted



The ideal?

A fresh start

- Shipping games is fun
- Working on games you love is fun
- Working with passionate, talented people is fun

Have fun while shipping great products!



A fresh start

Our approach

- Strive to ship a game in 3 months
- Comes with compromises!
- Scope of games is always in your face
- ‘Build the plane while you're flying it’
- Embrace the idea that you'll make mistakes and quickly learn and adapt from them



Minimum viable product

A fresh start

- Build the smallest core experience
- Grow and develop with your users
- Embraces the scope and connectivity of devices
- Less wasted time and effort
- Allows for more creativity and flexibility
- Identify potential problems



The teams



Small and flexible

The teams

- Teams are 7 (+/-) 2 people, with one Director
- Scrum / Agile development
- Preference flexibility and general knowledge over specialization
- Everyone has a deep level of involvement in all aspects of the project
- Everyone is a Toy Maker



The circle

The teams



Small workflow

The teams

- The entire game may be completed in less time than a single system of a AAA title
- Quick design docs
- “Let’s try it”
- Tools are minimalistic and created as necessary
- Don’t fear the mistakes, they’re going to happen!



The games



The core tenants

The games

- Prototype and experiment until you find a nugget of fun
- Remove any features that don't augment that nugget of fun
- Polish, polish, polish



Nugget of fun?

The games

- Anyone can come up with it, inspiration can come from anywhere at any time
- Open, pie-in-the-sky phase
- Search for the positives, imagine the solutions
- Creative ideas come from happy people, and rarely from the office



Indie Fridays

The games

- Days for growth and exploration of new ideas
- Scary at first!
- Foster the creativity of your employees
- Open, creative collaboration across teams
- Lightning quick prototyping!
- No less than 25 new game ideas



Dream big, build small

The games

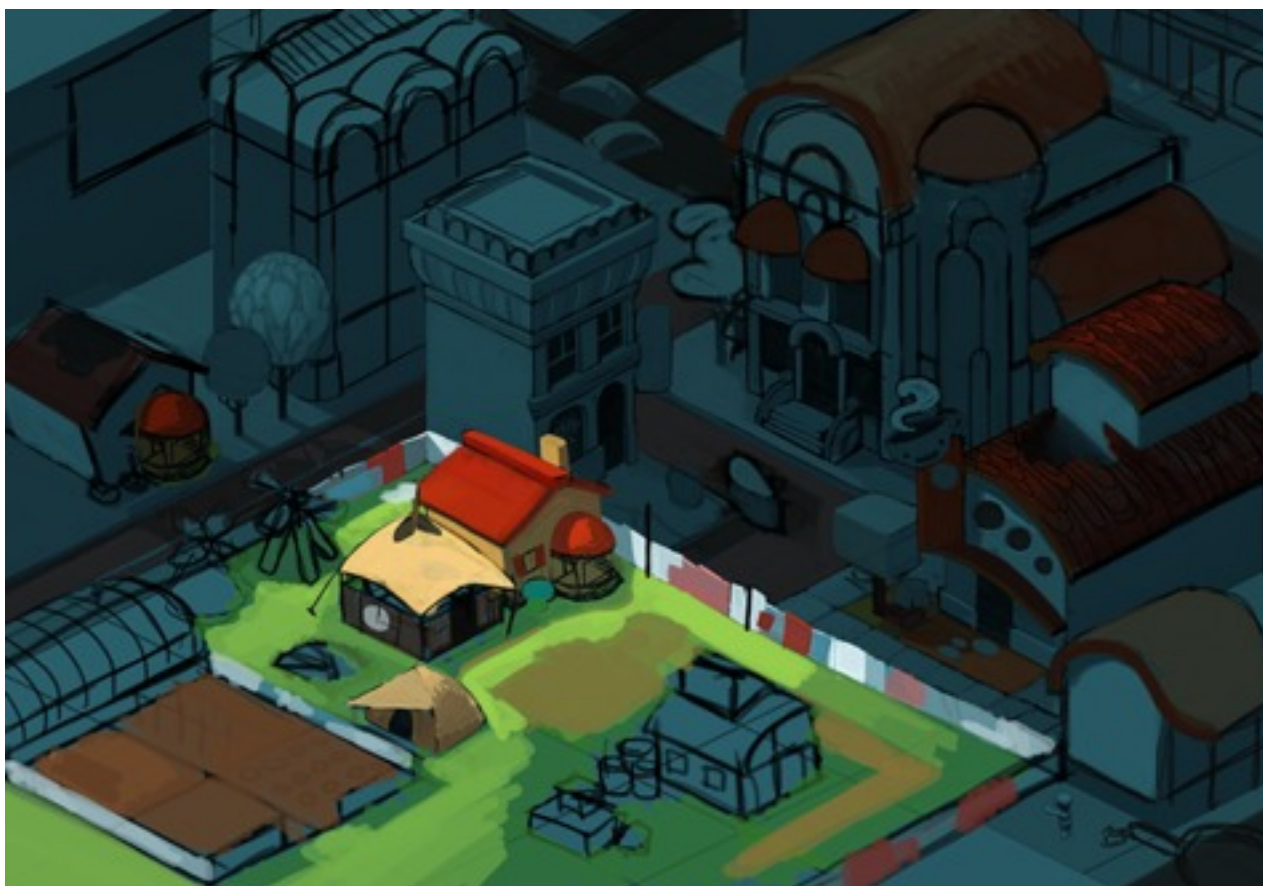
- Let your ideas be as grand as possible, but understand your limitations
- Keep a razor sharp focus on what could be built in 3 months
- Get a first version up and running as quickly as possible



Be willing to change

The games

- Remain open to iteration and changes
- Get as much feedback as possible
- Augmented by transparent team communication



Social connections

The games

- Embrace the ways that mobile devices connect people
- Facebook, Twitter, Google contacts, GPS, Gamecenter, Email, Phone contacts
- Passive multiplayer like leaderboards, achievements, online presence
- Push notifications

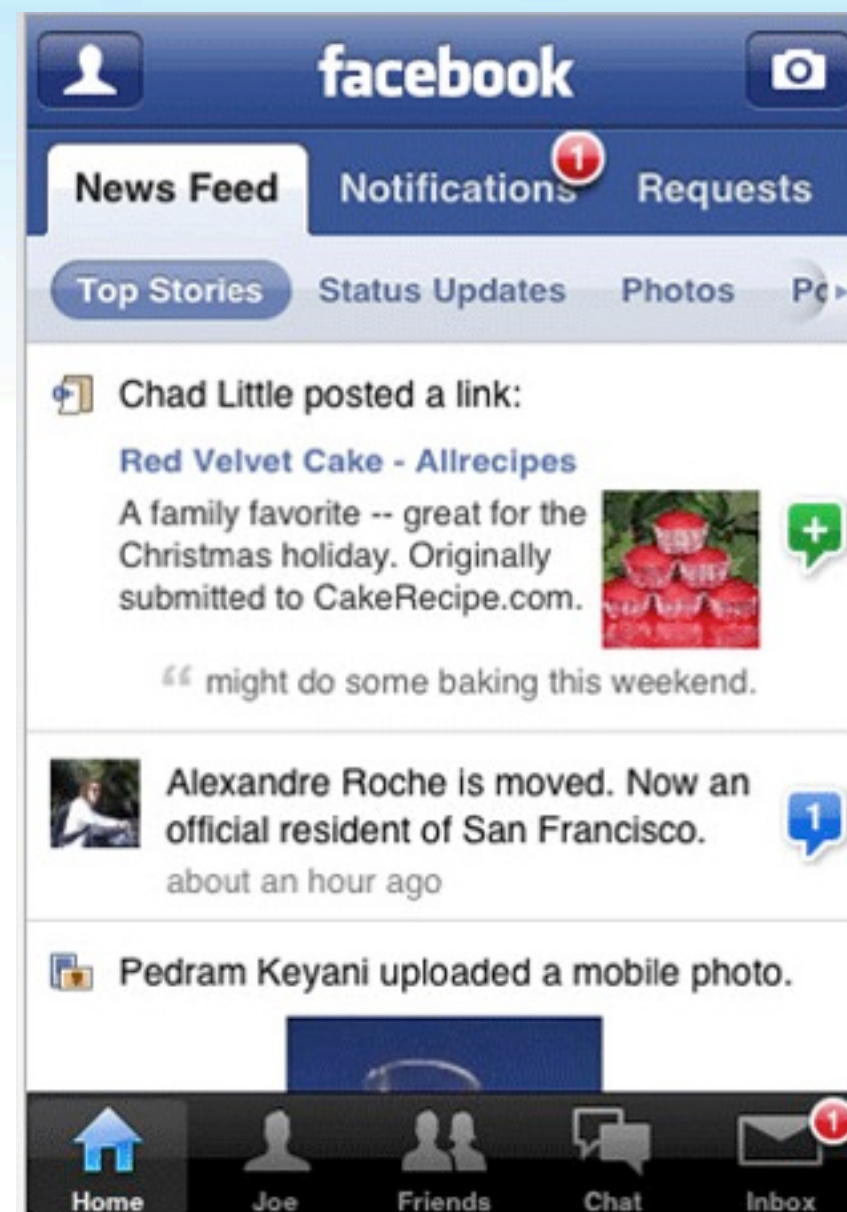


Social feel

The games



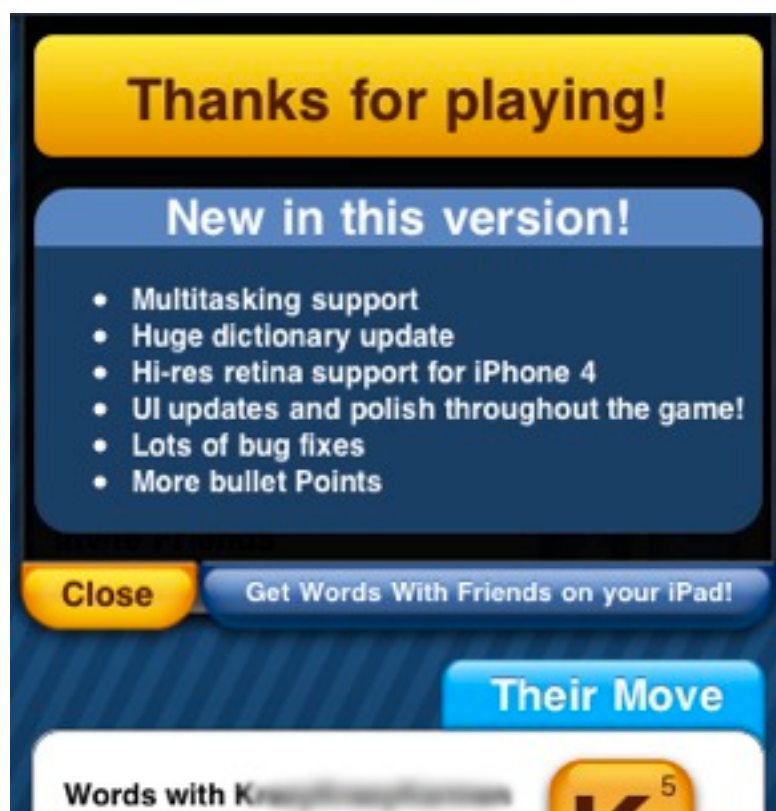
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Always connected

The games

- Opportunity to grow features with your users
- No feature is cut because of time, only pushed
- Can always add content and patch your game
- Methods to communicate to your users



The money

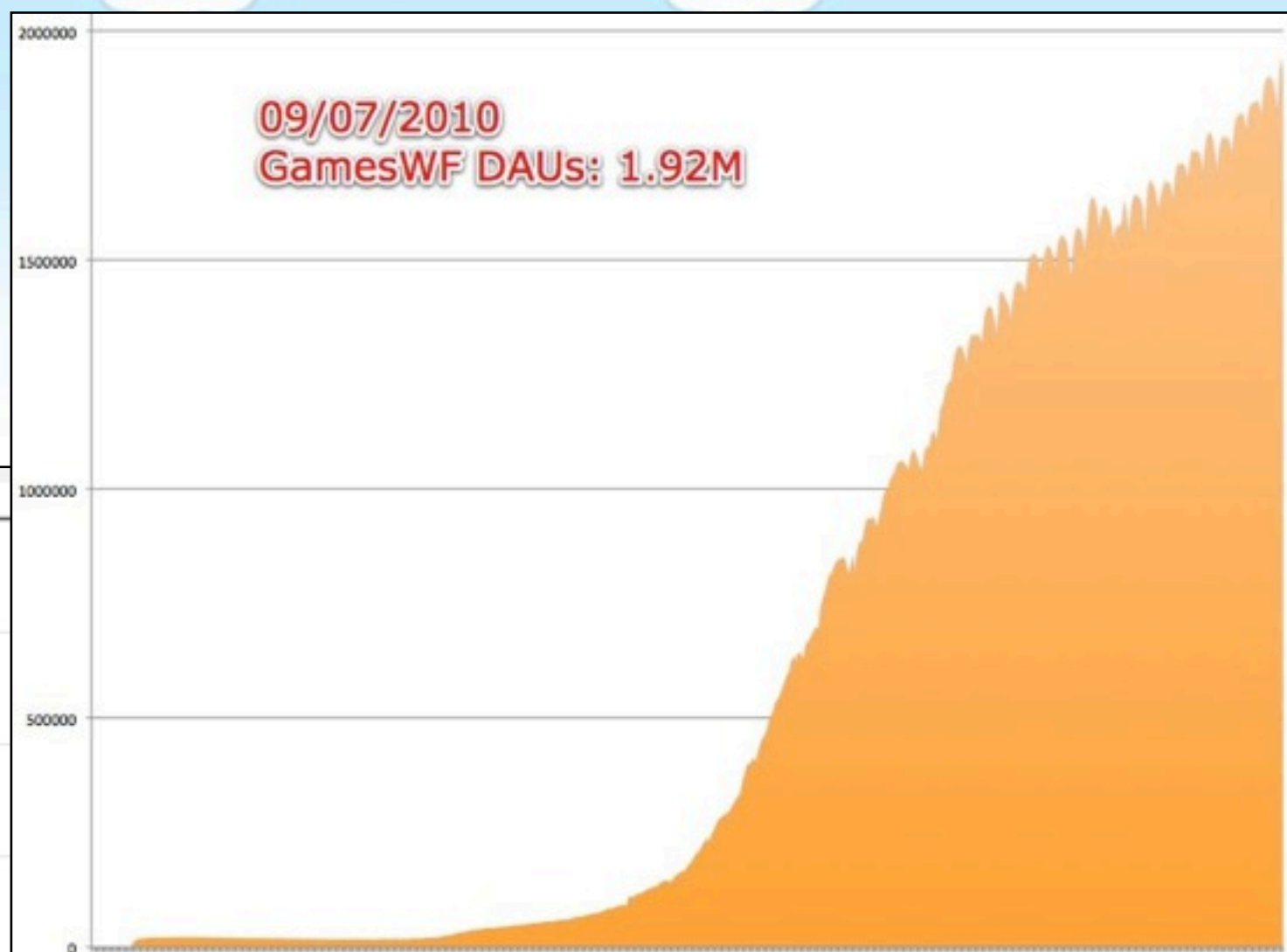
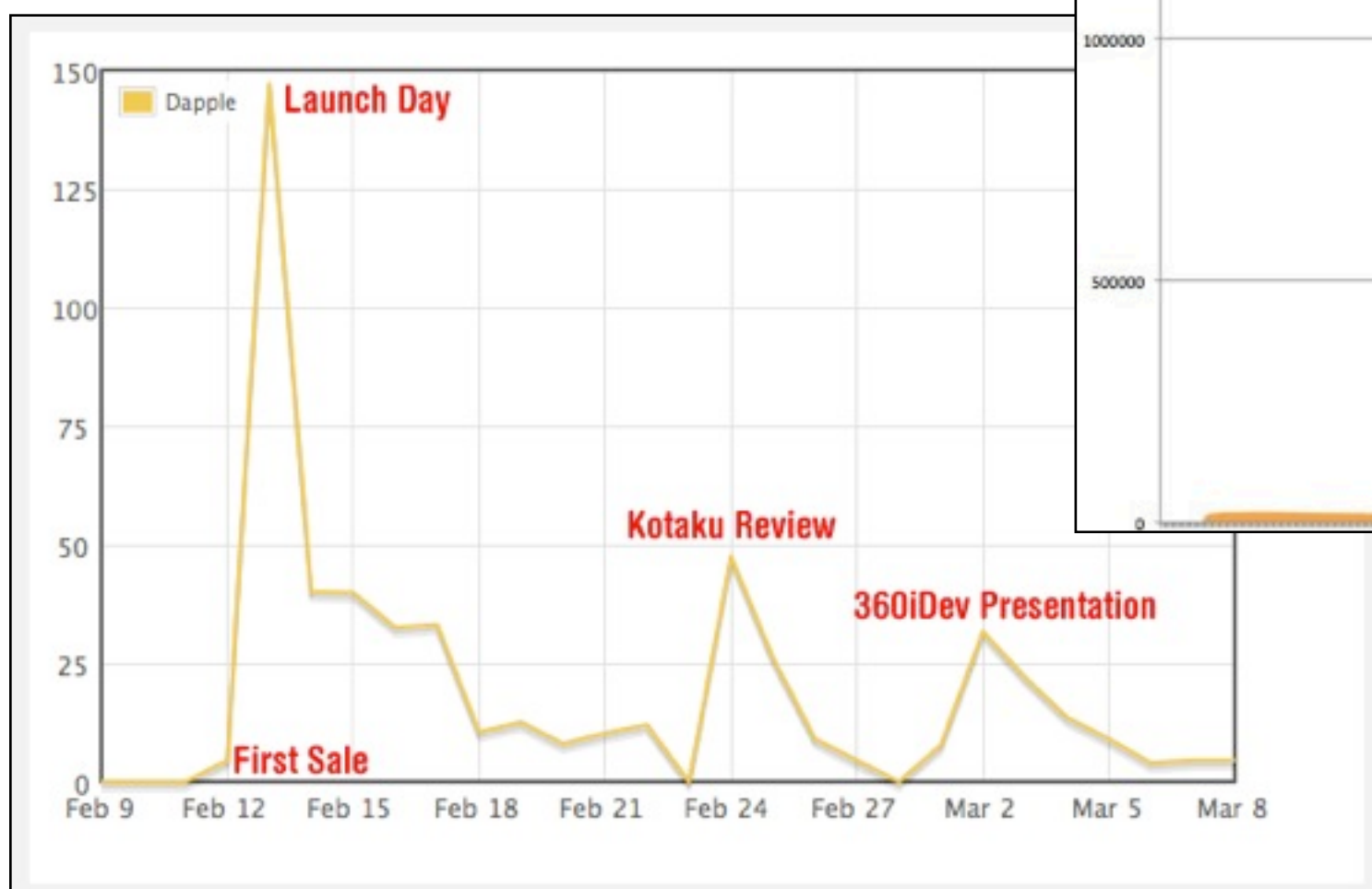
The games

- Different monetization strategies and understanding them is pivotal
 - Freemium
 - Advertisements
 - Microtransactions
 - Cross promotion
- DAUs, MAUs, viral growth and impressions become more important than sales
- Playing the chart position game



Long term success

The games



Simplicity and polish

The games

- Remember your audience!
- Devices are made for pick up and play games
- Launch times, responsive UIs and simple choices absolutely matter
- Polish is an uncompromisable phase of the project
- Polish phase never compresses, only moves



The processes



Don't rebuild

The processes

- Middleware is easy to embrace
- With smaller projects, each piece has a huge impact
- Literally thousands of developers solving the same problems as you
- Open source is huge! Use it and give back
- Reuse your own code, make a Toybox



What we use

The processes

- Cocos2D
- CocosDenshion
- FBConnect
- UISpec
- JSON
- UIKit
- Ruby / Rails
- Memcache
- Redis
- ActiveScaffold
- MySQL
- Perl



Know your limits

The processes

- Compromises with team size and schedule
- Contract out work to make additional content
- The painful cuts at the end of the project are often the best!



Pivotal tracker

The processes

The screenshot displays the Pivotal Tracker web application interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with "Projects" and "PIVOTAL TRACKER" logo. Below it, a secondary bar shows "Item Tagging" and project names: "REAL Accounting", "REAL Eric Daily", "REAL IT", and "REAL Tech Buildout". The main interface is divided into three columns: "Current", "Backlog", and "Icebox".

Current Column: Shows items with a "10" count and "18 Apr - Current" date. Items include "New demo gear not scanning (LH)", "Implement cycle counting (MT)", "Rental Shop Inventory (LH)", "Receiving process", "FCS Sku migration", "Document key controls over daily transactions", and "Define process for canceling orders and returns".

Backlog Column: Shows items with a "11" count and "25 Apr" date. Items include "Define/document/train process for use of Promo accounts (LH)", "Camp reschedule SKU", "REAL Team Promo account setup", "Posting accounts for employee sales bonus", "Digest loss statistics from Phys Inv 2009", "Figure out inv. cost pool sequencing...", and "Pat D account balance issue".

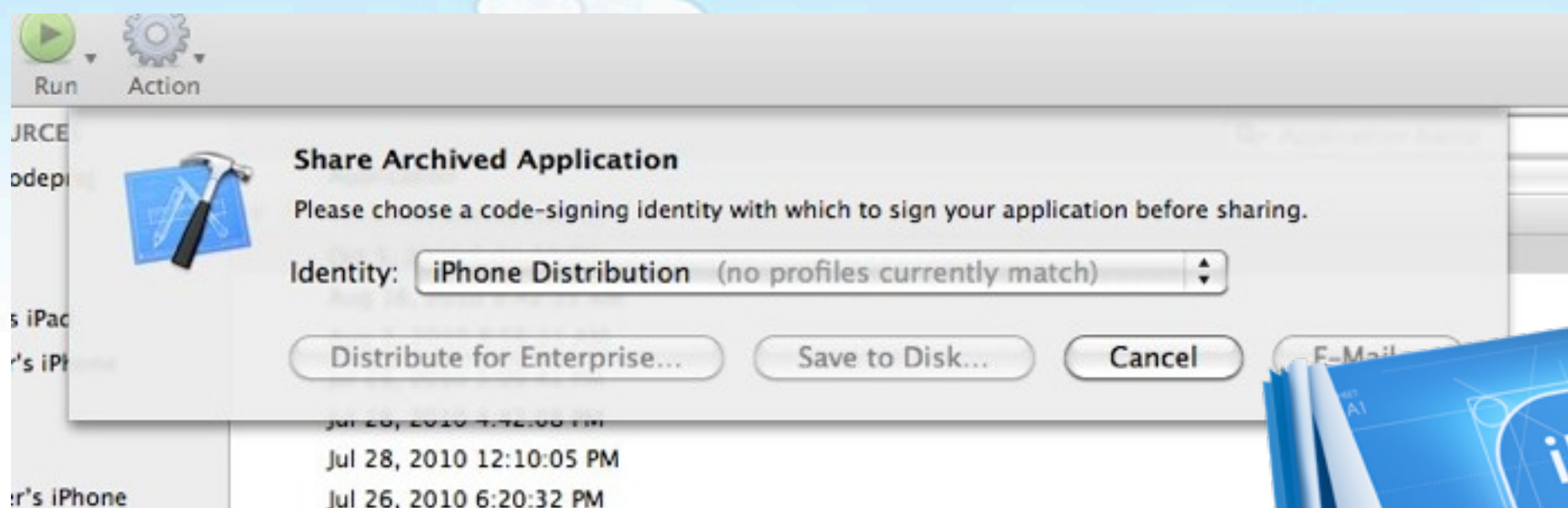
Icebox Column: Shows items with a "Select All" button. Items include "Can't update qty on crm orders - per Amy (EN)", "Fix QOH blank in CRM", "Updated list of Used and Demo Items for sale for the Web (CS)", "ORD-44449 to GP (lost order) (EN)", "Review and finalize COA", "Reconcile receivables", "Configure GP Fixed Asset Tracking", "Enter Fixed Asset Tracking data", and "Current Inventory Issues".

At the bottom, there's a copyright notice: "© 2010 Pivotal Labs / Policies / Feedback".



App distribution

The processes



Games as a service

The processes

- 30% of Twitter's write traffic
- 120,000 requests per second
- All started on slicehost
- Profile and scale up the pain points as they appear
- Leverage existing experience
- Keep 24 / 7 maintenance outside of development team



Constantly improve

The processes

- There is always more to learn
- Look out for new technologies and new ways to work better
- Learn from fellow developers!
- Just as important, give back



This is all new

The processes

- Don't be afraid to experiment!
- “The ‘Words With Friends’ app is the new Twitter” - John Mayer
- This is a new space, let's grow and develop it together
- Trying out new ideas is quick and easy!



In conclusion

- Work to the strengths of the mobile platform
- Small, agile approaches have huge potential
- Start everything with a small scope, grow with your developers and users
- Leverage existing work and fellow developers
- Be open to working in new ways



Thanks!

Any questions?

Or, email me:

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