

Working Carefully on the Fly:

Thoughts on Live Social Game Design

Troy Whitlock



Who am I?

Troy Whitlock, Creative Director
Playdom/Disney Interactive Media Group



Pogo.com / Electronic Arts 2001 - 2009



Early “Social” Game Features

- Game as Service
- Free To Play
- Avatars
- Microtransactions
- Gifting



My First “Social” Games



Word Whomp Derby

By Electronic Arts
[Facebook About Page](#)

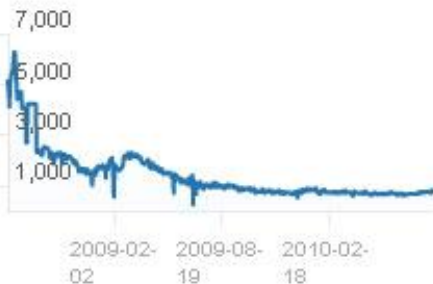
Word Whomp Derby is a fast-action word game, where you can speed by your friends using quick-witted ...

Global Rank: #4374

Daily Active Users: 768 (1%)

Average Age: 0 yrs old
Social Graph Influence: 0 friends

Reach: Daily Active Users



Operation Mania

By Pogo.com
[Facebook About Page](#)

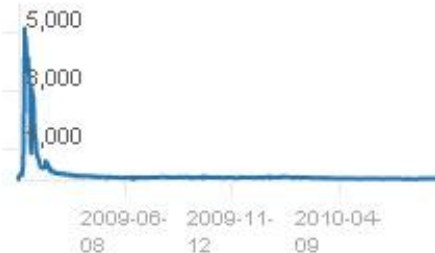
Check Up Challenge, inspired by the popular kid's game, brings the board game to life online! Earn...

Global Rank: #19856

Daily Active Users: 32 (1%)

Average Age: 0 yrs old
Social Graph Influence: 0 friends

Reach: Daily Active Users



Pogo Puppies

By Electronic Arts
[Facebook About Page](#)

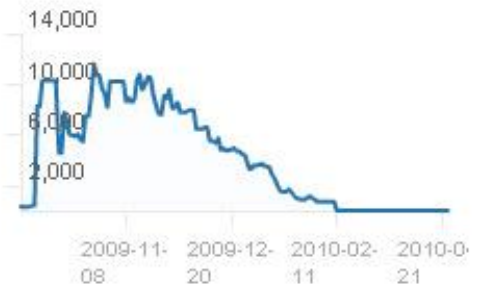
Pogo Puppies is a Dog Meets Dog world! Choose your puppy from real breeds. Shop for pet and doghous...

Global Rank: #142720

Daily Active Users: 0 (0%)

Average Age: 0 yrs old
Social Graph Influence: 0 friends

Reach: Daily Active Users



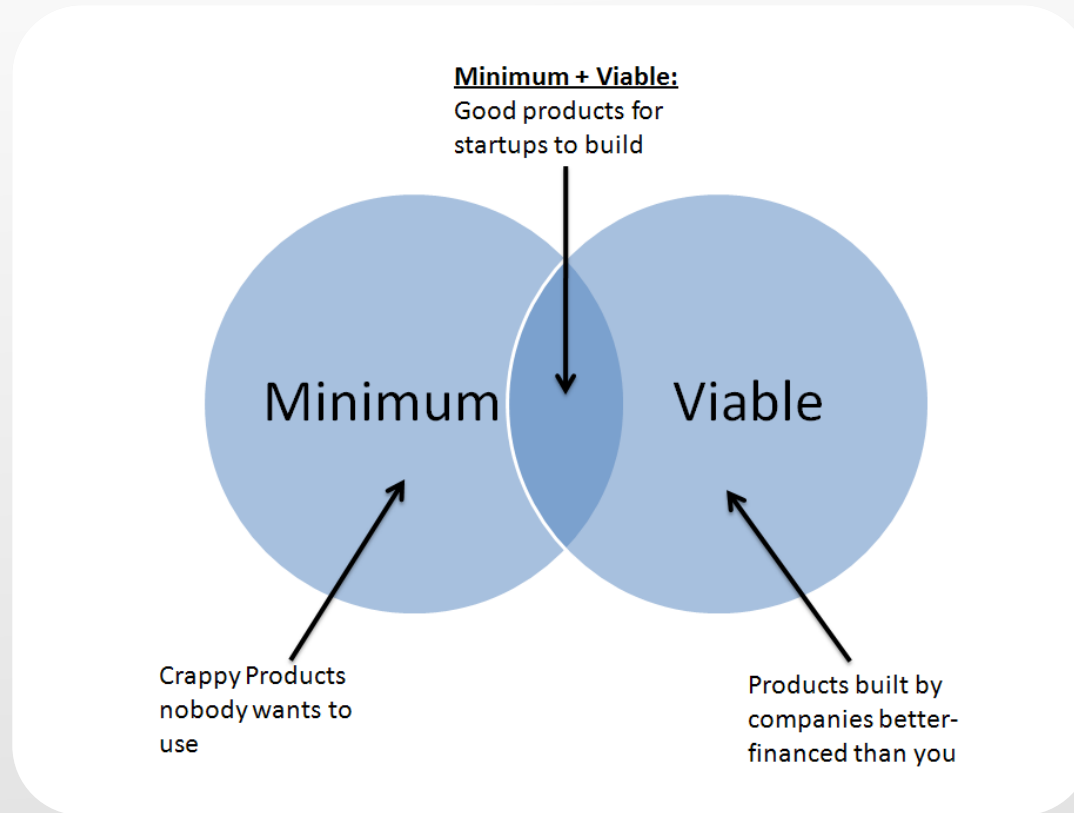
Pogo Puppies



A Year at Playdom



Minimum Viable Product



Minimum Viable Product

New Game General A

1. Default Section

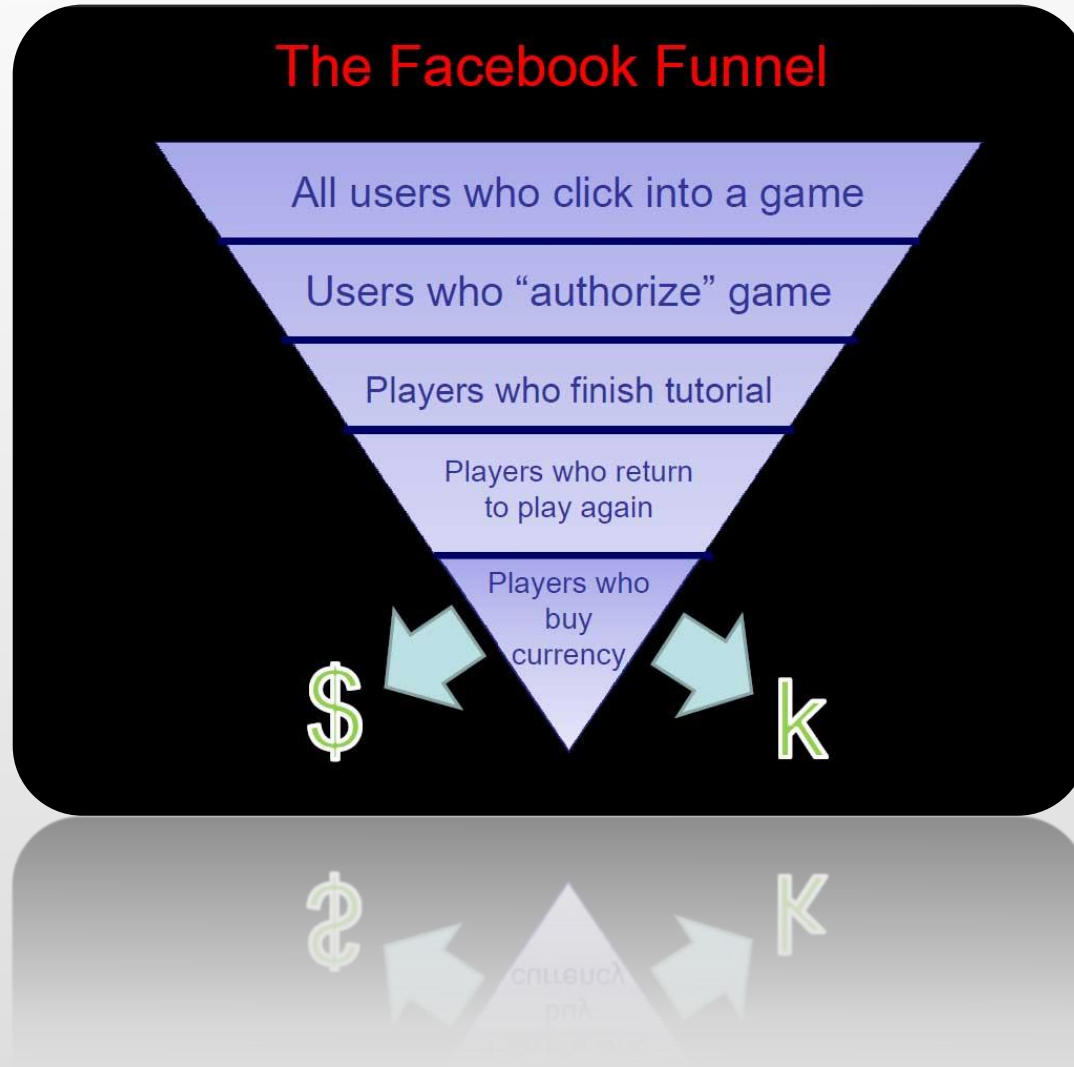
Thank you so much for helping us to shape the future of facebook games. We appreciate your feedback!

Game Image

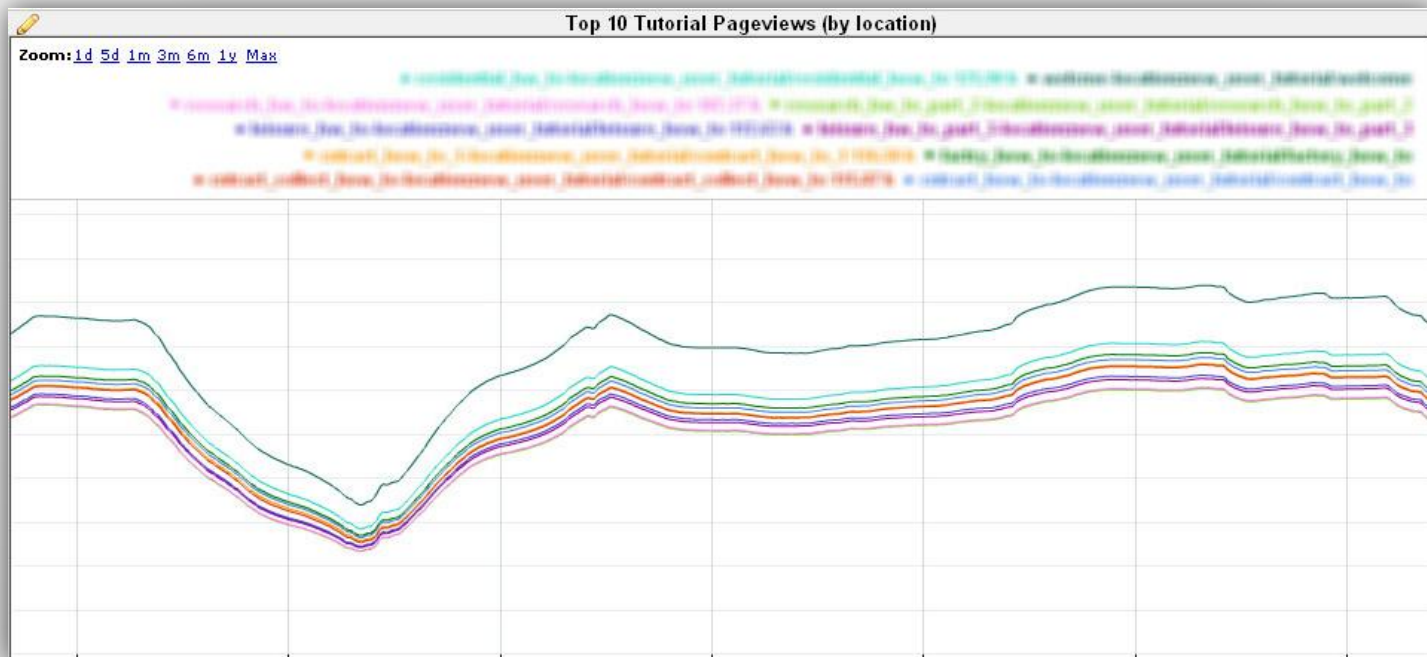


1. Looking at the above concept image for a new game do you feel this game looks like fun?

The Funnel



The Funnel



The Funnel



The Funnel



CONFIGURATION 1

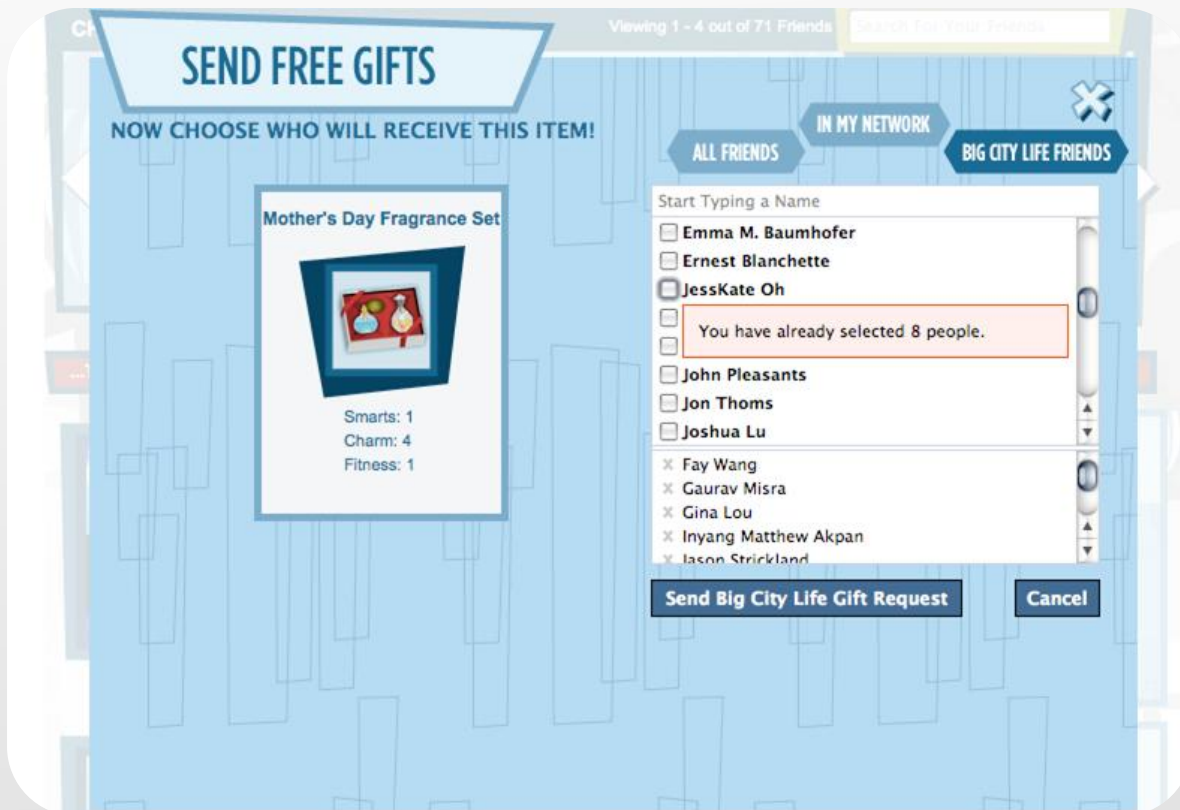


CONFIGURATION 2

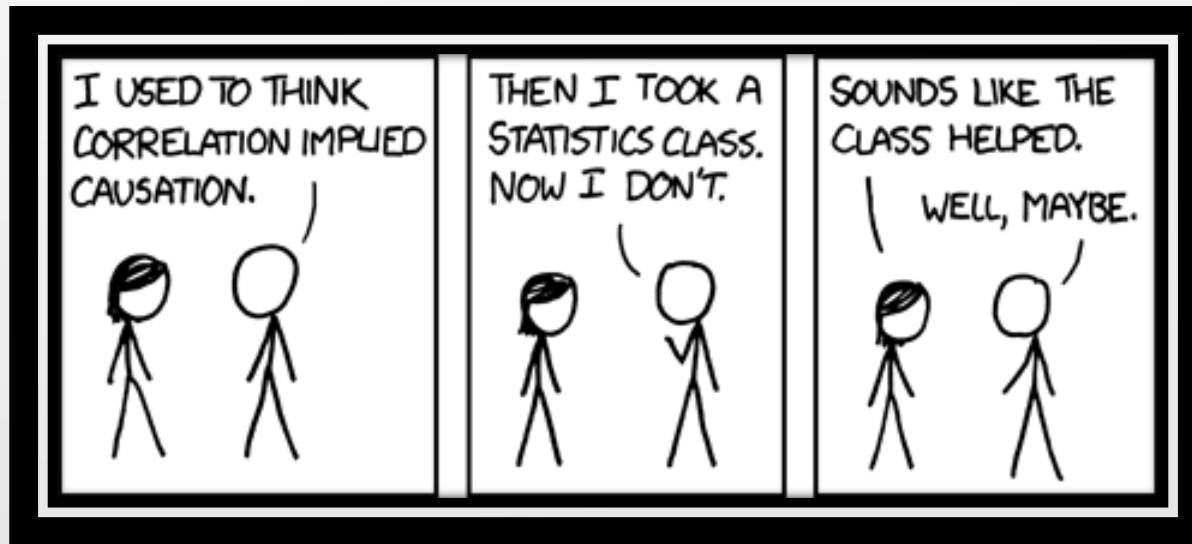
CONFIGURATION 3

CONFIGURATION 4

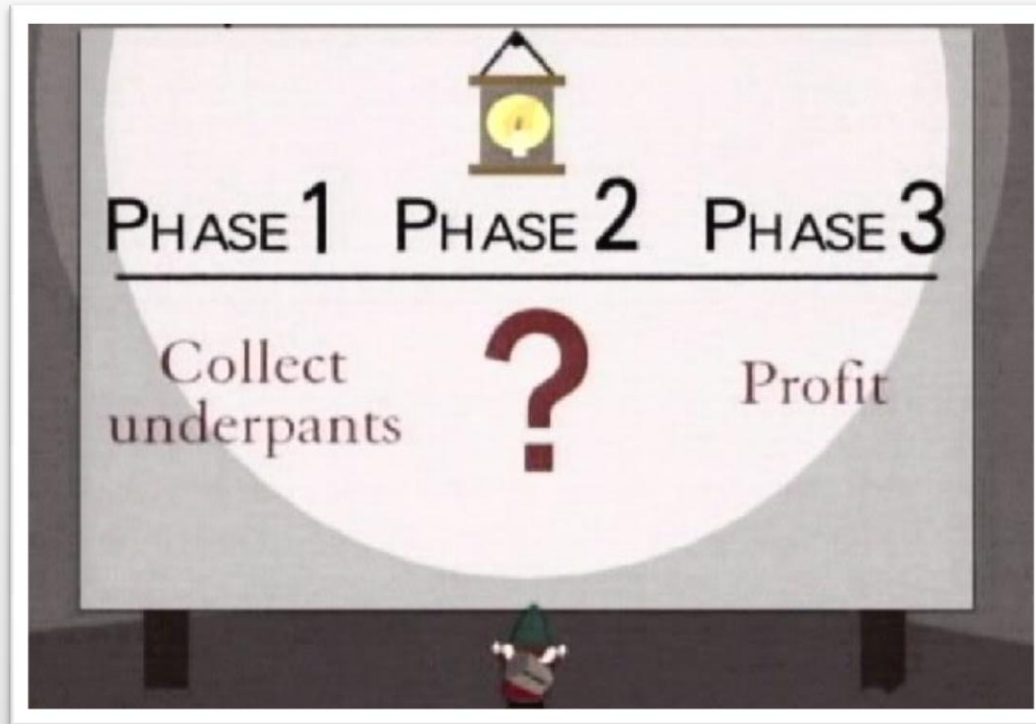
Bucketing



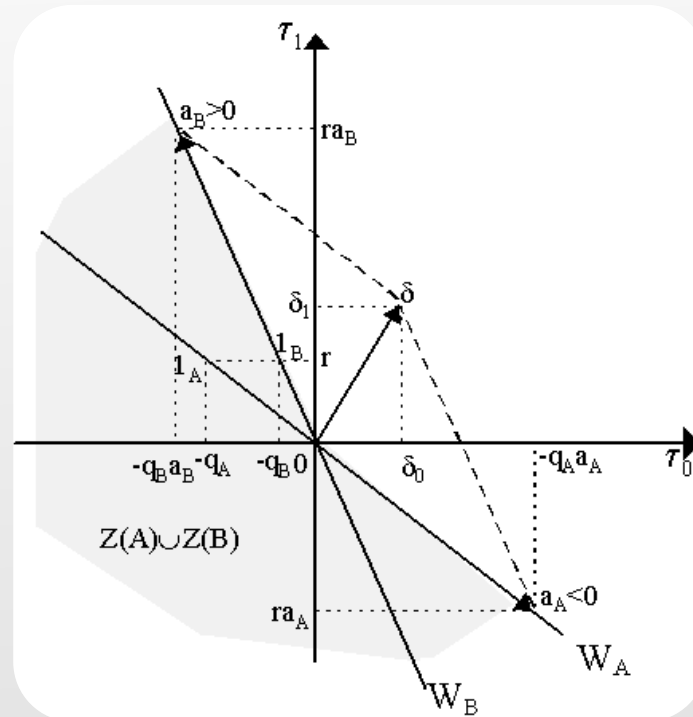
A/B Testing



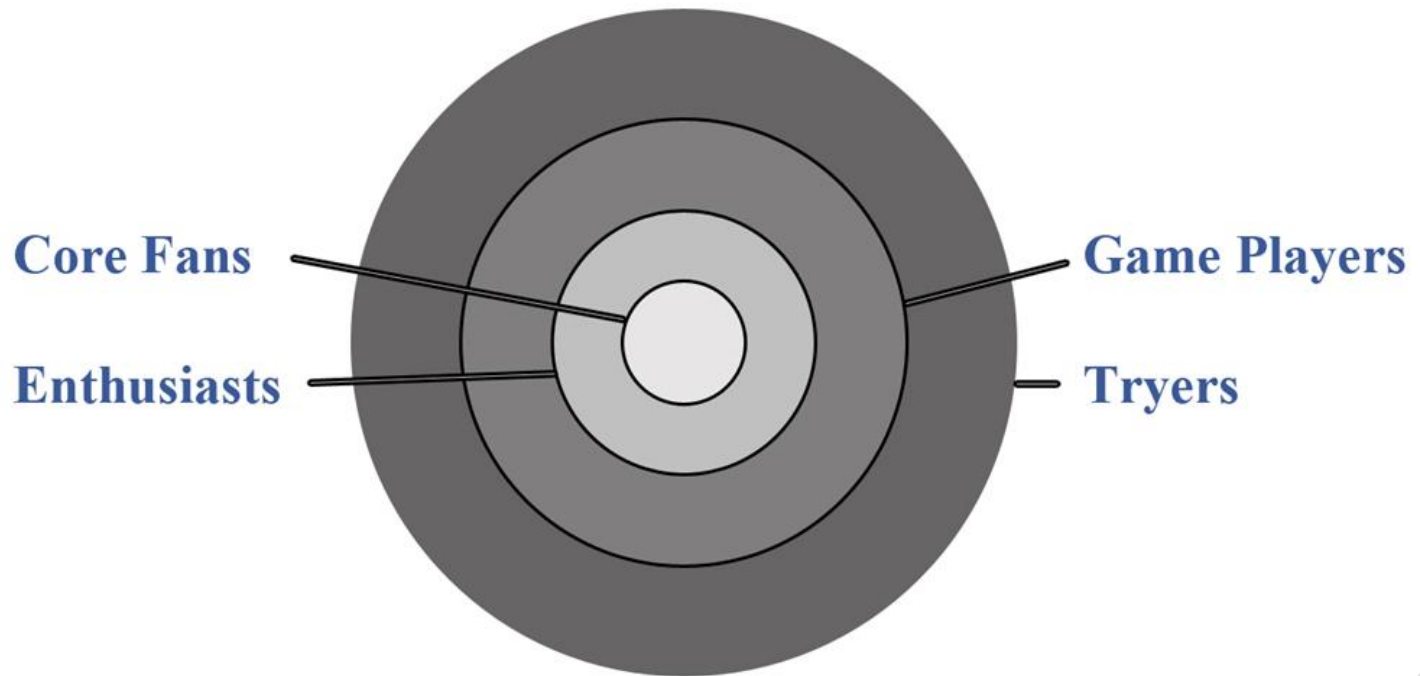
Arbitrage



Arbitrage

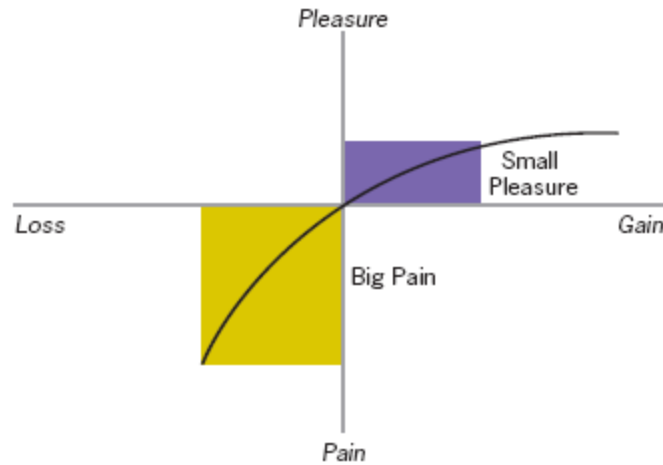


Arbitrage

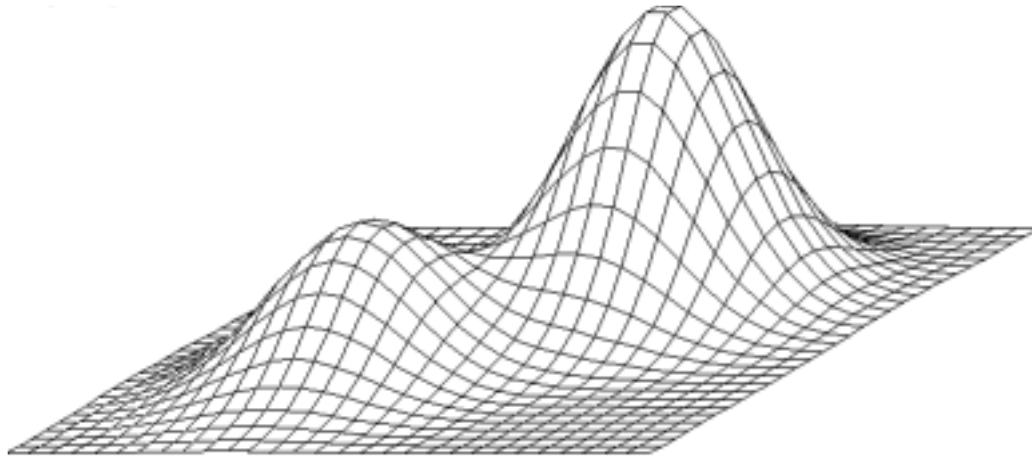


Behavioral Economics

LOSS AVERSION



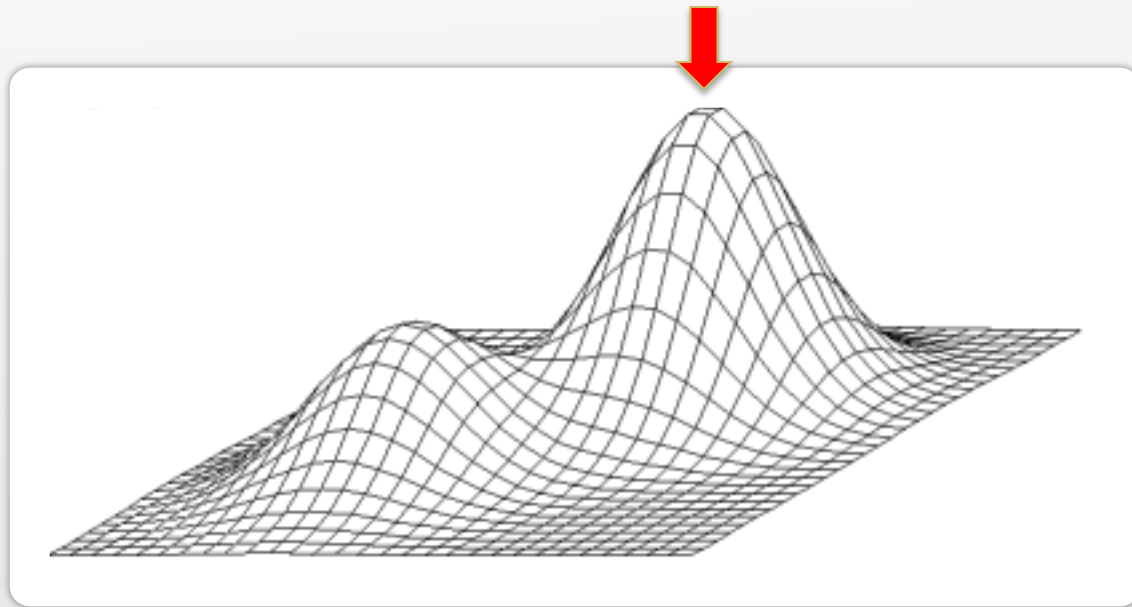
Localized Maximum



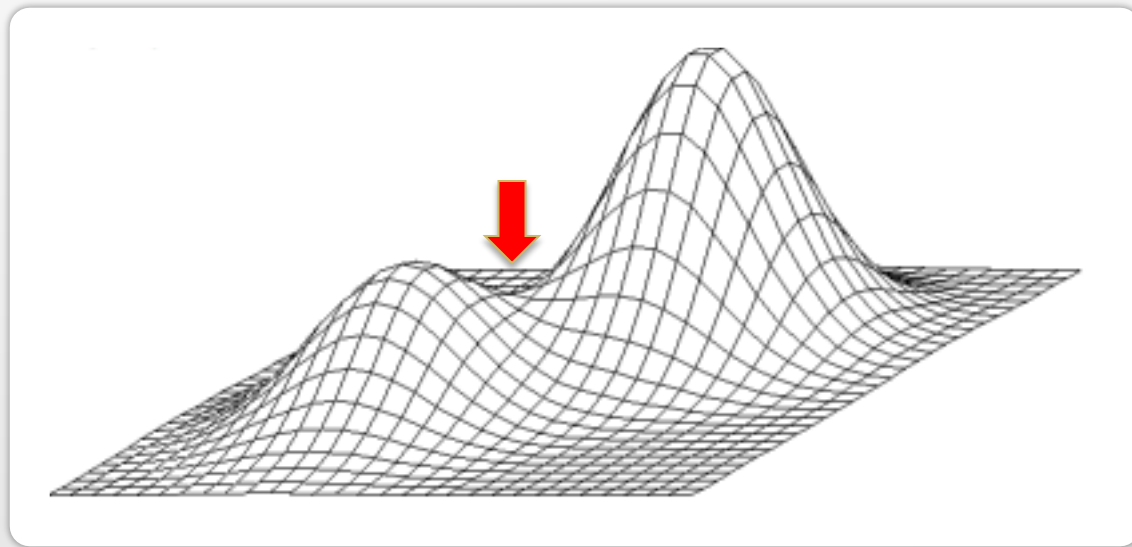
Localized Maximum



Localized Maximum



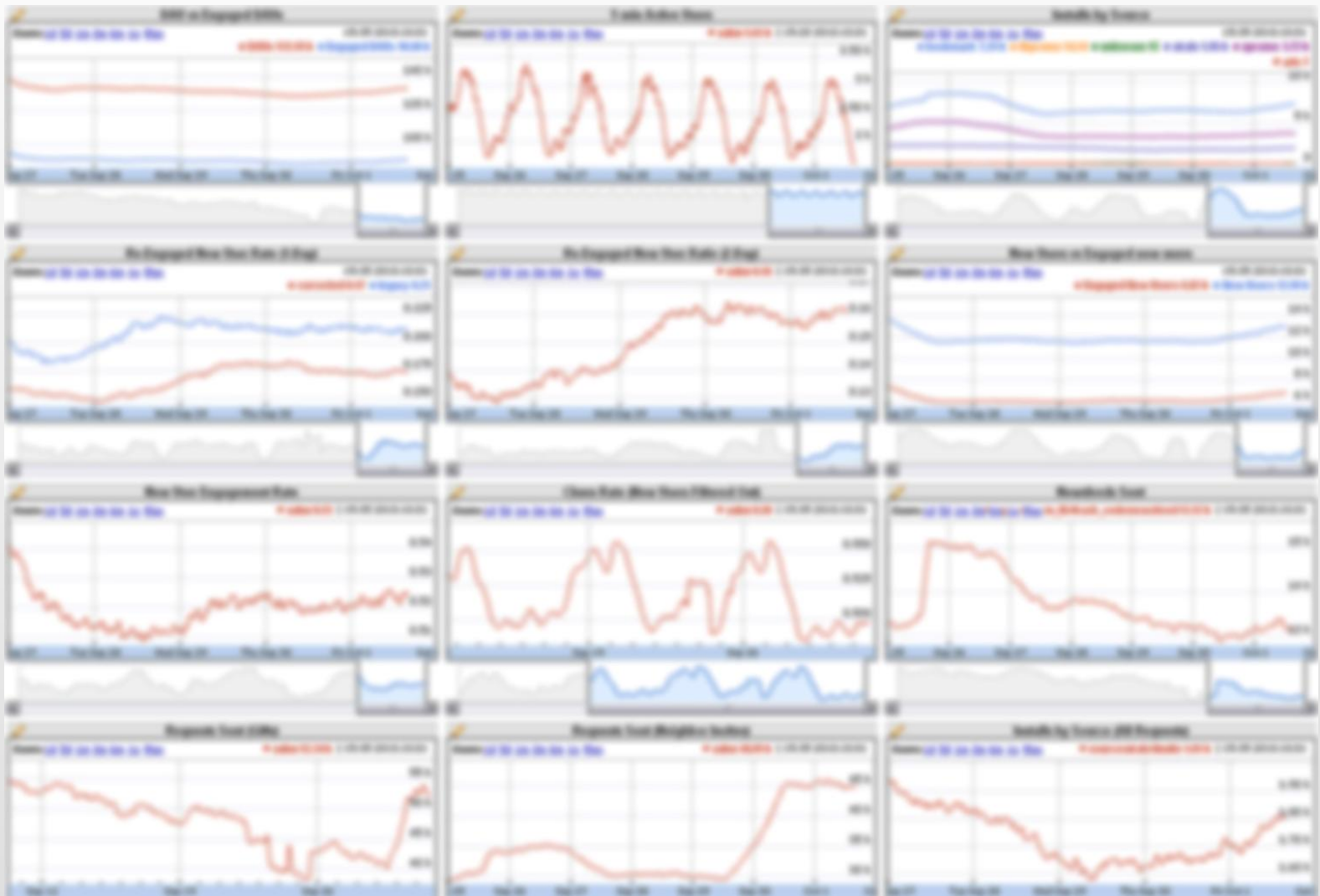
Localized Maximum



What is so different about Social Game Design?

1. Design must move the numbers
2. The customers decide what is fun
3. The platform is constantly changing
4. Your work is never done

Design must move the numbers



Moving the Numbers

There are only 3 numbers that matter

- Growth
- Engagement
- Revenue

Growth & Re-Engagement

- Growth
 - users discovering your games through the social network
- Re-engagement
 - users being reminded to return to your game
- Both depend on use of viral channels

Welcome to Facebook, David. You have 1 friend request and 2 other requests.



Share with your friends

Share your status, photos, and videos with friends.



View and edit your profile

Fill in details and upload a picture to help your friends recognize you.

News Feed

News Feed View Live Feed 11

Facebook Platform D

Status Updates

Photos

Links

More

What's on your mind?



Rory Starks



Seth Green Nerf

www.youtube.com

Old Nerf commercial from 1992, starring Seth Green with a totally rad hairdoo... NOT!

11 hours ago · [Comment](#) · [Like](#) · [Share](#)



Trevor Smith and 4 other friends are now friends with **Kennon Lee**.

7 hours ago · [Add as Friend](#)



Bryan Chan Tester, **Jany Xu**, **Rob Harris** and **Eric Saar** are now friends with **Curt Stevens**.

7 hours ago · [Add as Friend](#)



Rob Harris



Rob would like some help growing their crops in **(Lil) Farm Life**, and would be very grateful for help fertilizing their crops.

6 hours ago via **(Lil) Farm Life** · [Comment](#) · [Like](#) · [Fertilize Rob's crops](#)

Requests

[See All](#)

- 1 friend request
- 1 **(Lil) farm life** request
- 1 wild ones invitation

Suggestions

[See All](#)

Lars Berg

12 mutual friends

[Add as friend](#)



Brandon Van Auken

12 mutual friends

[Add as friend](#)

Sponsored

Exclusive Soundtrack

[×](#)

Only AT&T brings you exclusive songs from top artists like Mariah Carey in support of Team USA. Become a fan for more information.

249,906 people are fans of AT&T.

[Become a Fan](#)

Connect With Friends

[Invite friends to join Facebook.](#)

[To find people you know who are already using](#)

Chat (0)

15



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Chat (0)

15



**Troy Whitlock**[Edit My Profile](#)

News Feed

Messages

Events

Friends

City of Wonder

Games

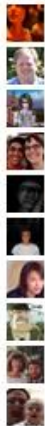
ESPNU College Town

1

Crime City

[See More](#)

20 +

Friends Online[See All](#) **Games****1 Pending Requests****Eric Todd**

Facebook User would like you to be Bush Whacking Buddy!

from Bush Whacker

Block Bush Whacker · Ignore All Invites From Eric

[Accept and Play](#)[Ignore](#)**Your Games****City of Wonder**

- Bring Leonardo Da Vinci's inventions to your city! · New items!!
- Pogo Derick built an Embassy for your nation! · Play City of Wonder!
- Denise Remhof built an Embassy for your nation! · Play City of Wonder!

**Crime City**

- Played about a week ago

[More](#)**Game Stories**[All Games](#)[City of Wonder](#)[Crime City](#)[All Games ▾](#)**Johnson Lee****I need friends to help me build my Wall!**

You can help me and earn free coins by lending a hand!

13 minutes ago via My Empire · [Comment](#) · [Like](#) · [Help Johnson](#)**Featured Games****Writer's Blox**

218,809 people play this.

Play

**Cupcake Corner**

559,936 people play this.

Play

**Fish Friends**

411,200 people play this.

Play

**Zoo Paradise**

4,660,223 people play this.

Play

**Happy Island**

6,740,001 people play this.

Play

**Troy Whitlock**[Edit My Profile](#)

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Friends

City of Wonder

Games ESPN College Town **1**

Crime City

[See More](#)**20 +****Friends Online**[See All](#) **Games****1 Pending Requests****Eric Todd**

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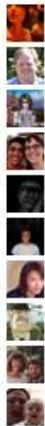
1

Crime City

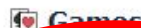
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Game Stories

All Games

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All Games ▾

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Friends



See All

Games

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Your Games



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City of Wonder

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All Games ▾



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Happy Island

6,740,001 people play this.

Play



Feeds

Celebrating Accomplishment



Marianna just earned a 50k Star Medal in Bejeweled Blitz.

Marianna earned this medal with a score of 54,150 and her next medal will be awarded at 75k.



5 hours ago via Bejeweled Blitz · [Comment](#) · [Like](#) · [Play Bejeweled Blitz](#)



2 hours ago via Bejeweled Blitz · [Comment](#) · [Like](#) · [Play Bejeweled Blitz](#)



Feeds

Another Way of Gifting



Maya found some Treasured Golden Mystery Eggs to share with their friends!

Maya was just feeding Tiffany Walsh's chickens and made them so happy that they laid an extra batch of Treasured Golden Mystery Eggs!



6 hours ago via FarmVille · [Comment](#) · [Like](#) · [Hatch an egg](#)

6 hours ago via FarmVille · [Comment](#) · [Like](#) · [Hatch an egg](#)



Feeds

Collaboration



Assistance request to help slay The Amethyst Sea Serpent on Castle Age!

Your friend Jay has requested your help in battling The Amethyst Sea Serpent on Castle Age!



3 hours ago via Castle Age · [Comment](#) · [Like](#) · [Assist Jay](#)



3 hours ago via Castle Age · [Comment](#) · [Like](#) · [Assist Jay](#)



Feeds

Barn Raising



Steven Meretzky Okay, I hate to resort to threats, but help me build this Forbidden City or I will flood your market with cheap imported goods.



Help Steven build the Forbidden City and get a FREE BONUS!
Need help building your marvel? Post the link in the Comments section below!



Monday at 9:06pm via City of Wonder · [Comment](#) · [Like](#) · [Help to Collect Bonus](#)



Monday at 9:06pm via City of Wonder · [Comment](#) · [Like](#) · [Help to Collect Bonus](#)



Feeds

Bonus for Friends



Steven Meretzky



Steven finally completed construction on the marvelous Forbidden City!

Meretzkiium celebrates their monumental achievement with FREE BONUSES for their visitors!



4 hours ago via City of Wonder · [Comment](#) · [Like](#) · [Collect Bonus](#)



Scott Macmillan Thank God. :D

4 hours ago · [Like](#)

Write a comment...

Write a comment...



4 hours ago · [Like](#)

Write a comment...

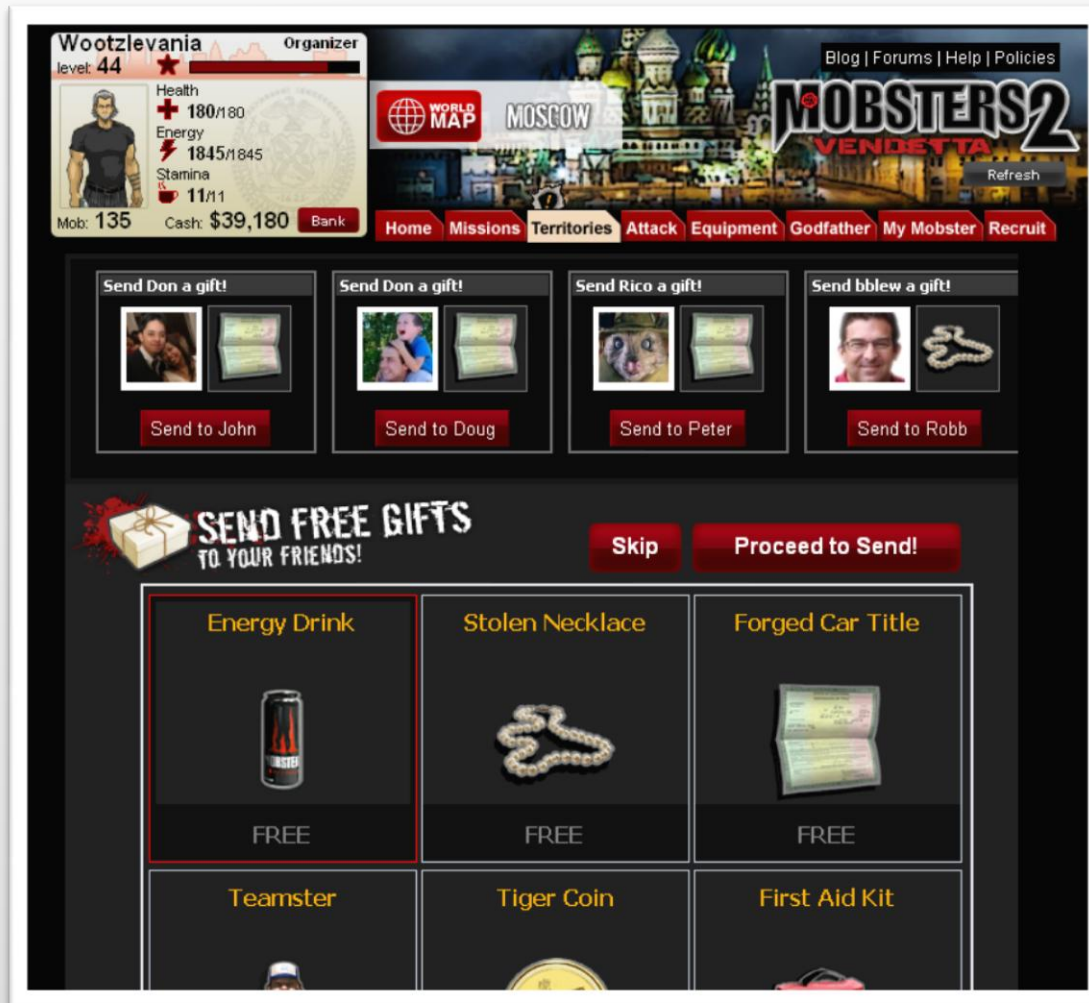
Requests

Neighbors



Requests

Gifts



Moving the Numbers

There are only 3 numbers that matter

- Growth
- Engagement
- Revenue

Engagement

- Users come back daily because
 - They like the game
 - They are anticipating something new
 - They feel they need to take care of something (positive or negative emotion)
 - “Web of Social Obligation”

Moving the Numbers

There are only 3 numbers that matter

- Growth
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- Revenue

Revenue

- ARPPDAU
 - Average Revenue Per Daily User
 - Ranges between $<.01$ to $.10+$
- LTV
 - Life Time Value of a player includes
 - Revenue that player generates
 - Number of friends they bring to the game
 - Network value of Cross promotion

Revenue Features in CoW



City Builder



With PVP



James B. Player
Hit Man
"I am TANK, fool"
[Set Your Status](#)

ECCELLENTE!

You:
+ -7
(180/200)
+70000
+13

Them:
-22
-100000
-0

SPIRITED DEFENSE!

Attack again

Done



TerryBull
High Roller
"Hmmm... lucky punch!"
[Report Status](#)

You brought:

 x1	 x2	 x1
 x1	 x1	 x1

Equipment Details:

312	Melee	13
311	Guns	13
312	Explosive	13
312	Armor	13
249	Vehicle	13
312	Henchmen	13

Show More Equipment

They brought:

 x3	 x1	 x2
 x11	 x1	 x10

Light Decision Making



Trading in City of Wonder



Four things that players purchase

- Instant Gratification
- Consumables
- Decorations (particularly with functional benefits)
- Competitive Advantage

Instant Gratification



Consumables



Decorations



Competitive Advantage



What is so different about Social Game Design?

1. Design must move the numbers
2. The customers decide what is fun
3. The platform is constantly changing
4. Your work is never done

Customers Decide What is Fun

Listen to what your customers say (sometimes)
Watch what your customers do (always)

Divanarama

House: 184

Confidence: 108/108

Energy: 90/90

Stamina: 3/3

Cash: \$511,027

Influence: 3394/3450

level: 23

My Skills

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

You received \$50 because **KW** liked your style and voted for you.

Report

Announcement

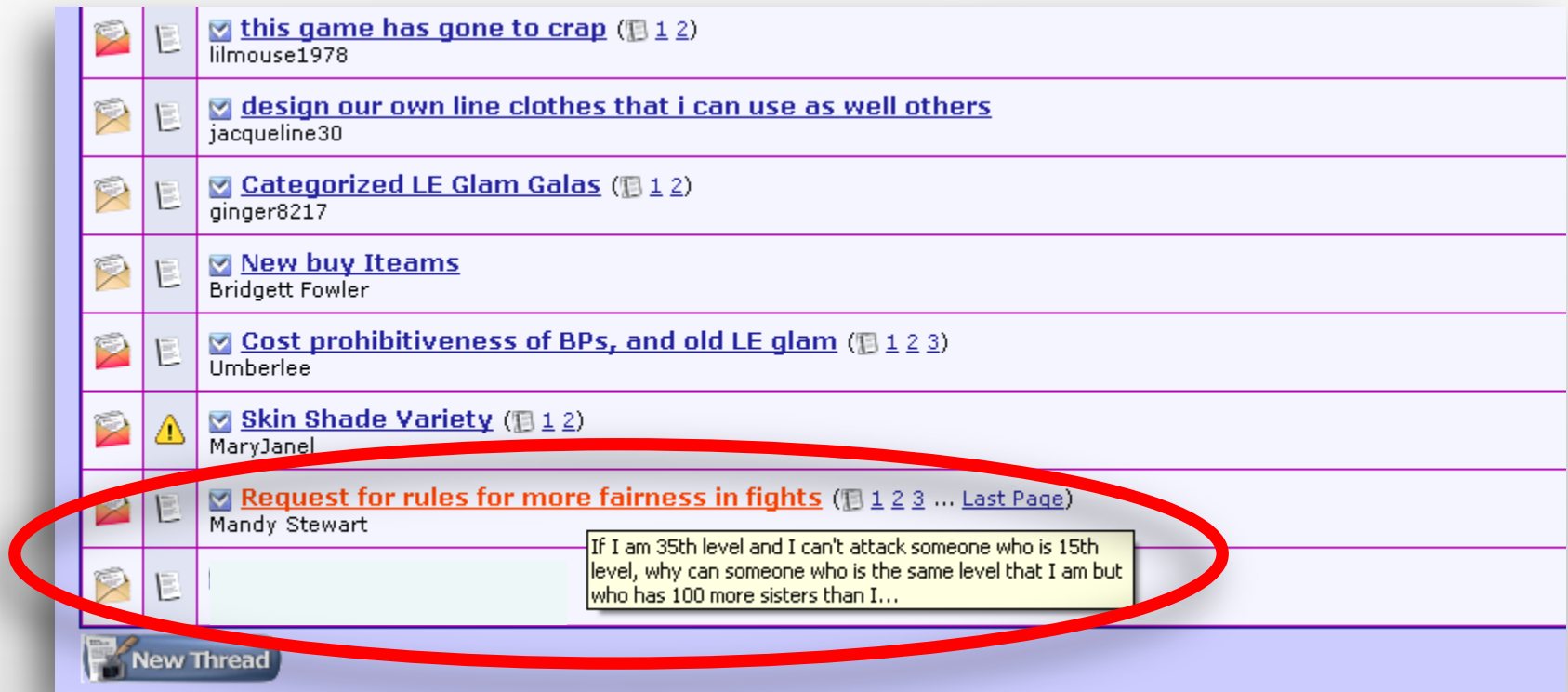
Run a special charity event and join our Help for Haiti campaign to raise money for Partners in Health. You can also make a donation to help out.

Playdom™ GDC Online | October 2010

Users Will Give You Good Ideas

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

And Bad Ones



A screenshot of a forum thread list. The threads are listed in a table-like format with icons for replies and a checkmark. The threads are:

- [this game has gone to crap](#) (1 2) by lilmouse1978
- [design our own line clothes that i can use as well others](#) by jacqueline30
- [Categorized LE Glam Galas](#) (1 2) by ginger8217
- [New buy Items](#) by Bridgett Fowler
- [Cost prohibitiveness of BPs, and old LE glam](#) (1 2 3) by Umberlee
- [Skin Shade Variety](#) (1 2) by MaryJanel
- [Request for rules for more fairness in fights](#) (1 2 3 ... Last Page) by Mandy Stewart

The thread "Request for rules for more fairness in fights" by Mandy Stewart is circled in red. Below the thread title, there is a yellow box containing the text:

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...

At the bottom left of the forum interface, there is a "New Thread" button.

City of Blunder

sam's development diary
from mind to matter

I'm Sam

City of Blunder

Playdom (the third biggest Facebook gaming company since its acquisition by Disney) recently released a rather critically acclaimed game onto our Facebook shores in City of Wonder. It is a refreshing take on the typical Town Building formula, with a more advanced technology tree and a basic, but kinda fun PvP system in which you attack other Cities to gain experience, cash and population. Of course, as a Facebook game it's still very limited compared to games *not* on the platform. Furthermore, its influences from the Civilization series are so blatant that it makes the experience one of disappointment to existing Civ fans (such as myself... role on September 24th!). Yet it is a step in the right direction, a step that a number of Facebook games are taking, bringing slightly more complex and tactical gameplay experience to the 60+ million Facebook gamers today.

However, it's very apparent that Playdom don't really think too hard about their game's design. City of Wonder is very pretty and very stylish, it's cartoony look is hard to dislike and its artwork of various historical figures is a pleasure to look at. In fact, I prefer it to that of previous Civ games (although Civ 5 is likely to blow it out of the water). In Facebook games, the look is important since people are happy with 1-click per minute content. What annoys me about City of Wonder is that there appears to be no real testing or thought behind the 'advanced' features that Playdom have introduced. It's like they're playing around with the concept but they don't feel like investing any time in making their innovation something special. After playing City of Wonder for a few weeks now, there are many obvious faults with these more advanced systems that you'd think Playdom would realize. This post is going to go through some.

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features that you'd think Playdom would realize. This post is going to go through some.

City of Blunder

Can you start to see the problem yet? Your battle energy resource is based purely on Cultural items. In order to battle, you must have a high happiness (which = high culture). Therefore, culture is the most important resource. If you have no culture, you cannot battle... even if you chose Trade or Military. But it gets worse...

- If you successfully 'attack' another player, you will receive rewards.
- Culture attacks = Experience. Trade attacks = Money. Military attacks = Population.
- Remember, your Expeditions are limited to happiness.
- Your happiness is limited to population.
- Military buildings provide no happiness but gives you population.
- Your reward for a military victory prevents you from taking part in Expeditions.

It's a complete disaster! Did they not think at all?

It's a complete disaster! Did they not think at all?





What Are Your Users Good At?

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

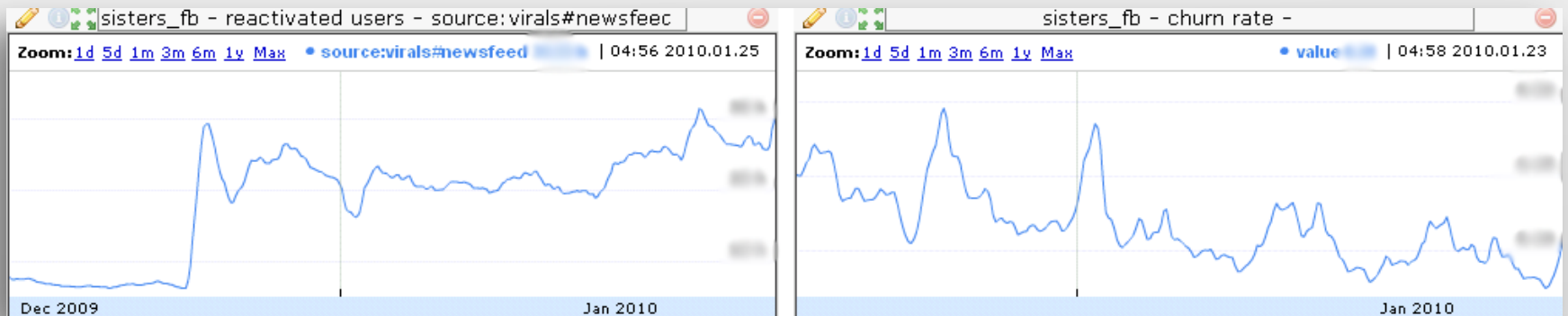
What Are Your Users Bad At?

- 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"/> Get Rid of Pop-ups, Please! 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...



What is so different about Social Game Design?

1. Design must move the numbers
2. The customers decide what is fun
3. The platform is constantly changing
4. Your work is never done

Constantly Changing Platform

Major platform changes over the last 12 months

- Removing Notifications Channel
- Introduction of Games Dashboard & Counters
- Numerous UI Layout changes
- Stricter Enforcement of TOS
- Facebook Credits

Rules Change Frequently



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

[View Group](#)
[Join Group](#)



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

[View Group](#)
[Join Group](#)

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
Mugging Payout: \$200 - \$300 Experience: +1	Required: Energy: 1	Do Job
House Burglary Payout: \$800 - \$1200 Experience: +3	Required: Energy: 3	Do Job
Stoplight Car Theft Payout: \$1400 - \$2500 Experience: +5	Required: Energy: 5	Do Job
Liquor Store Robbery Payout: \$2800 - \$4600 Experience: +8	Required: Energy: 7 Mobsters: 1	Do Job
Drug Dealing Payout: \$4000 - \$6500 Experience: +15	Required: Energy: 10	Do Job
Jewelry Store Robbery Payout: \$5000 - \$15,000 Experience: +20	Required: Energy: 15 Mobsters: 2	Do Job
Liquor Smuggling Payout: \$48,000 - \$72,000 Experience: +22	Required: Energy: 18 Mobsters: 5 (use 20) (3)	Do Job
Bank Robbery Payout: \$100,000 - \$400,000 Experience: +30	Required: Energy: 25 Mobsters: 15 (3) (10) (10)	Do Job

What is so different about Social Game Design?

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Your Work Is Never Done



80% of Effort is After Launch

- Ideal user life cycle is “forever”, but initial game not deep enough to sustain this
- 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







Embassy City



Embassy City



Players Expect More Stuff

		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <u>More Glam or something</u> 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>

Payers Expect Even More Stuff



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