Marvel Super Hero Squad Online Postmortem- An MMO For the Whole Family in Under Two Years

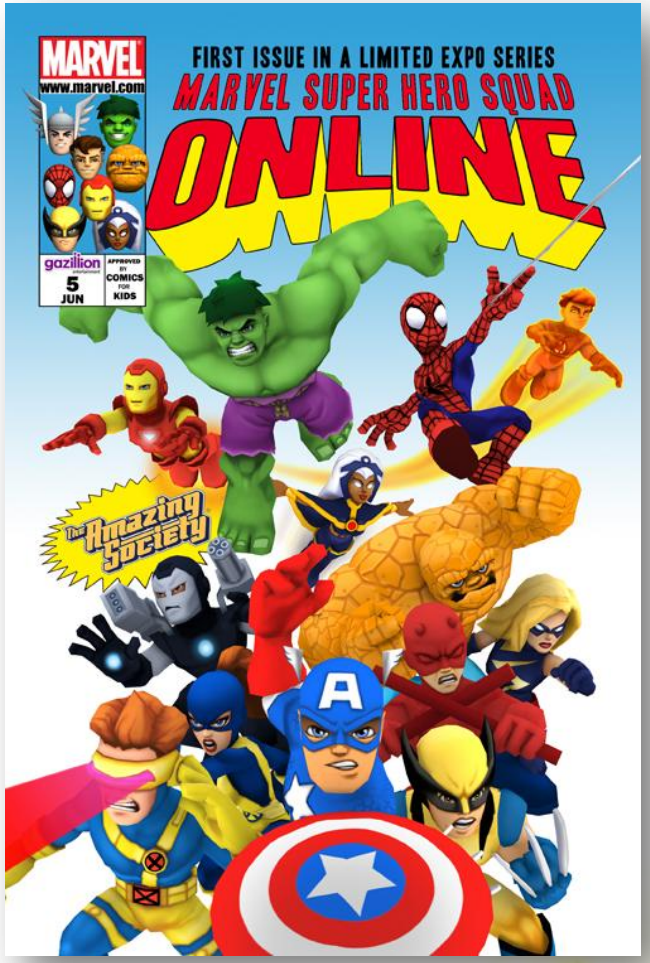
Jay Minn & Jason Robar
Co-Founders
The Amazing Society, a Gazillion Entertainment Studio

Game Developers Conference® Online 2011
October 10-13, 2011 | Austin, TX
www.GDCOnline.com

GDC 11 Online

gazillion entertainment

The Amazing Society



Who Are We?

INTRODUCTIONS

GDC 11 Online

The Amazing Society

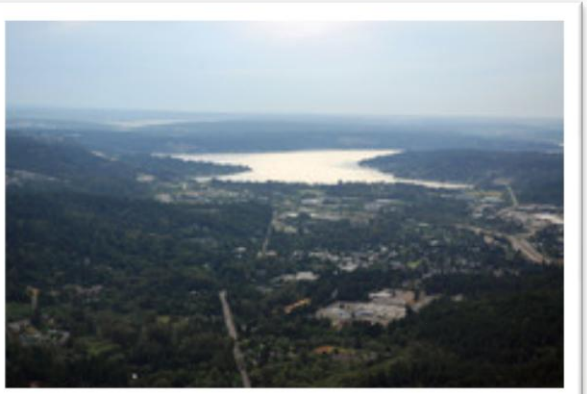
Formed in 2007

Acquired by Gazillion in 2008

Located in the heart of the tech heavy Pacific Northwest of the USA

Microsoft, Nintendo, Valve, Real Networks, McCaw Cellular, Amazon, Google, Verizon, Tmobile, PopCap, Monolith/TimeWarner, etc

Over 140 game industry companies including DigiPen's worldwide HQ



Co Founders

Jason Robar

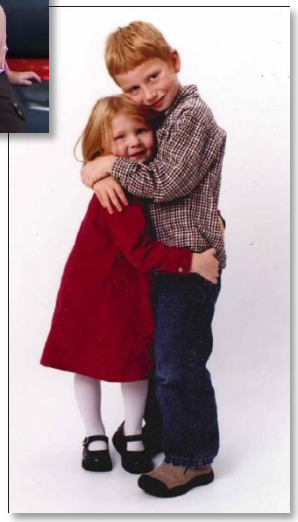
- 17 years of experience
- Director of internal MMOG development, Vivendi Games
- Founded MMOG Game studio in China/USA in 2005 – Studio Ch'in in Shanghai, SLS in Seattle
- Game Group Mgr for Playsite.com
- Microsoft for Windows DirectX game technology, online games and global developer relations for MSN Zone.com

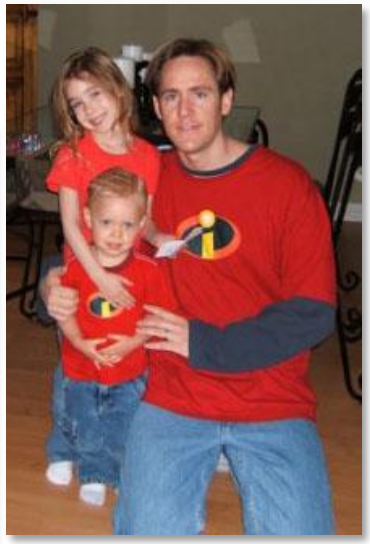
Jay Minn

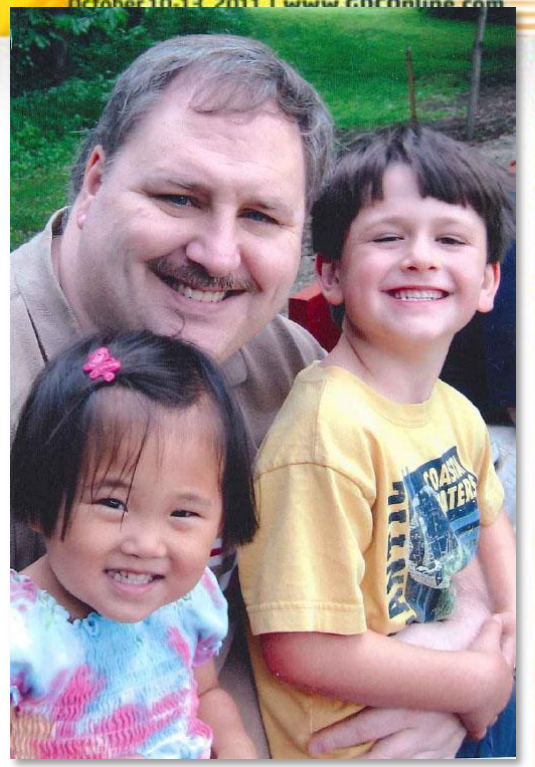
- 18 years of experience, with over 40 shipped titles
- Executive Producer at Secret Lair (acquired by Vivendi)
- Creative Director & Director of Retail, Wild Tangent
- 9 years as independent studio owner

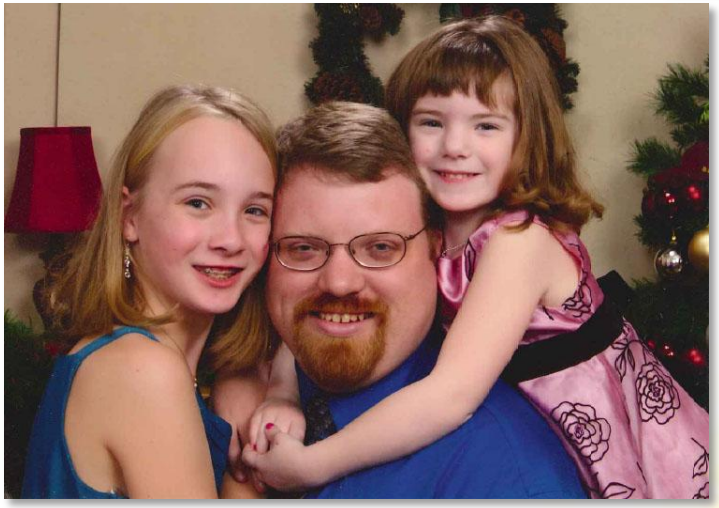
Experienced Team

- Avg age: 38 years
- Avg game industry experience: 13 years
- Mostly married with kids
  - 85% married, 65% with kids

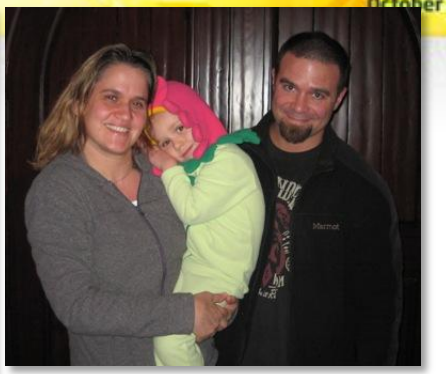




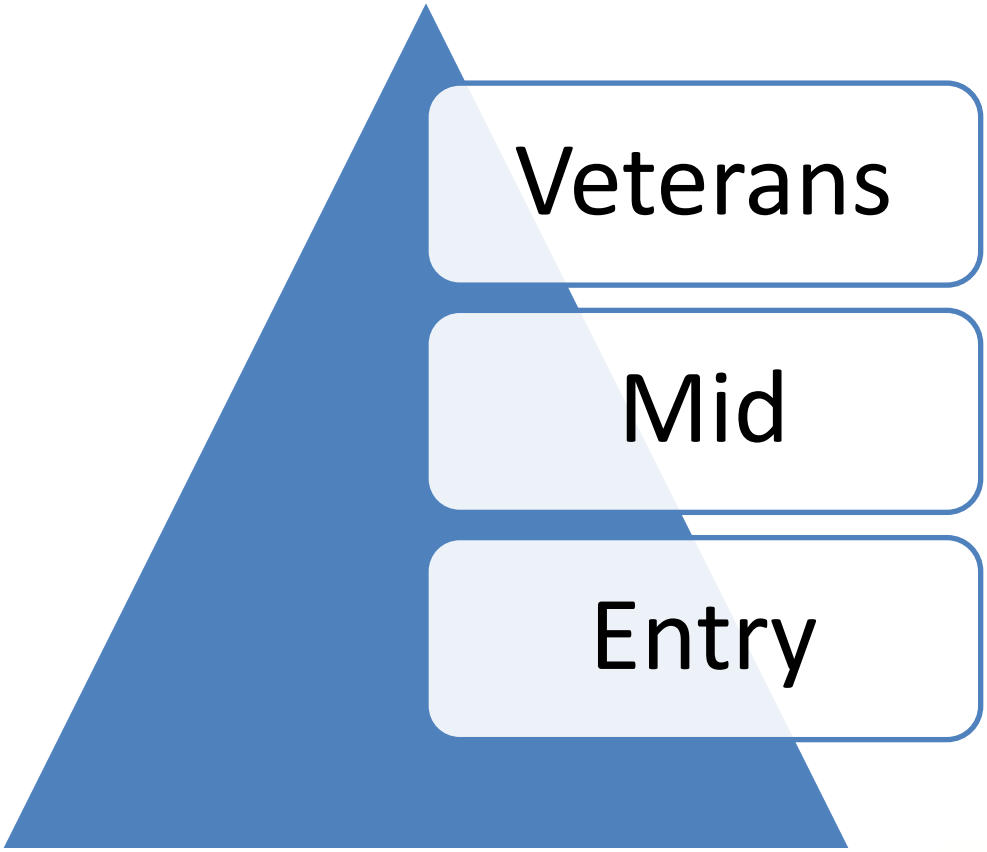




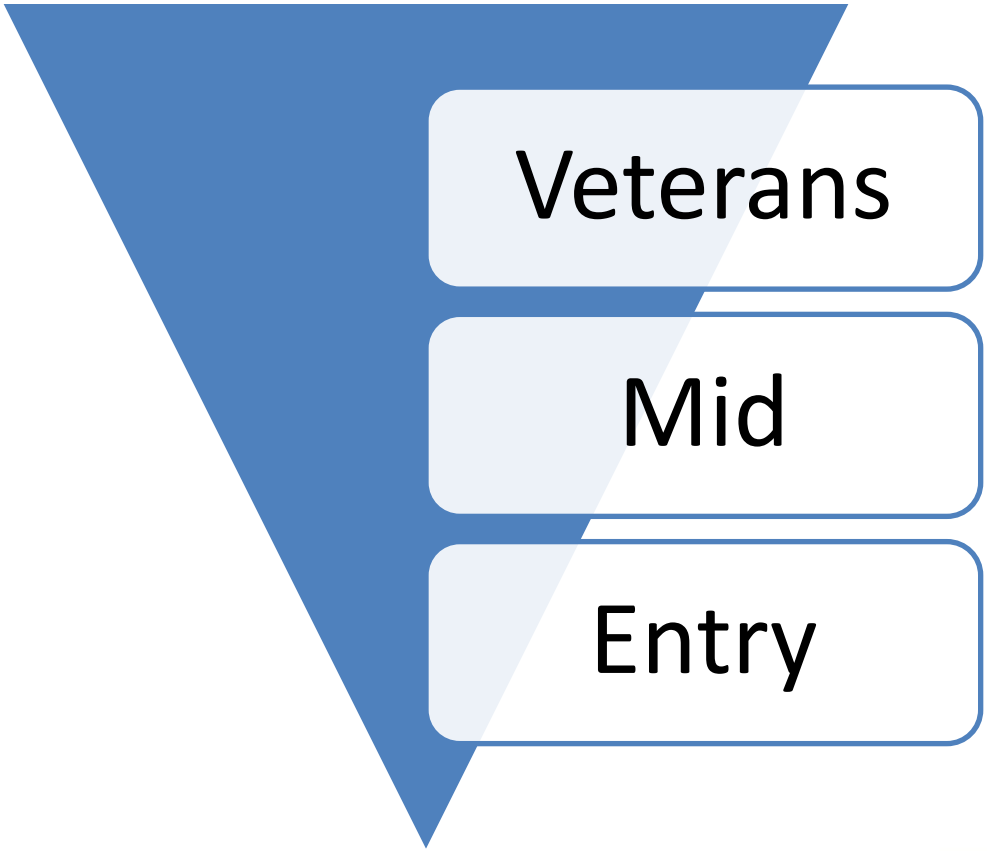
GDC 11 Online



Typical Teams



The Amazing Society



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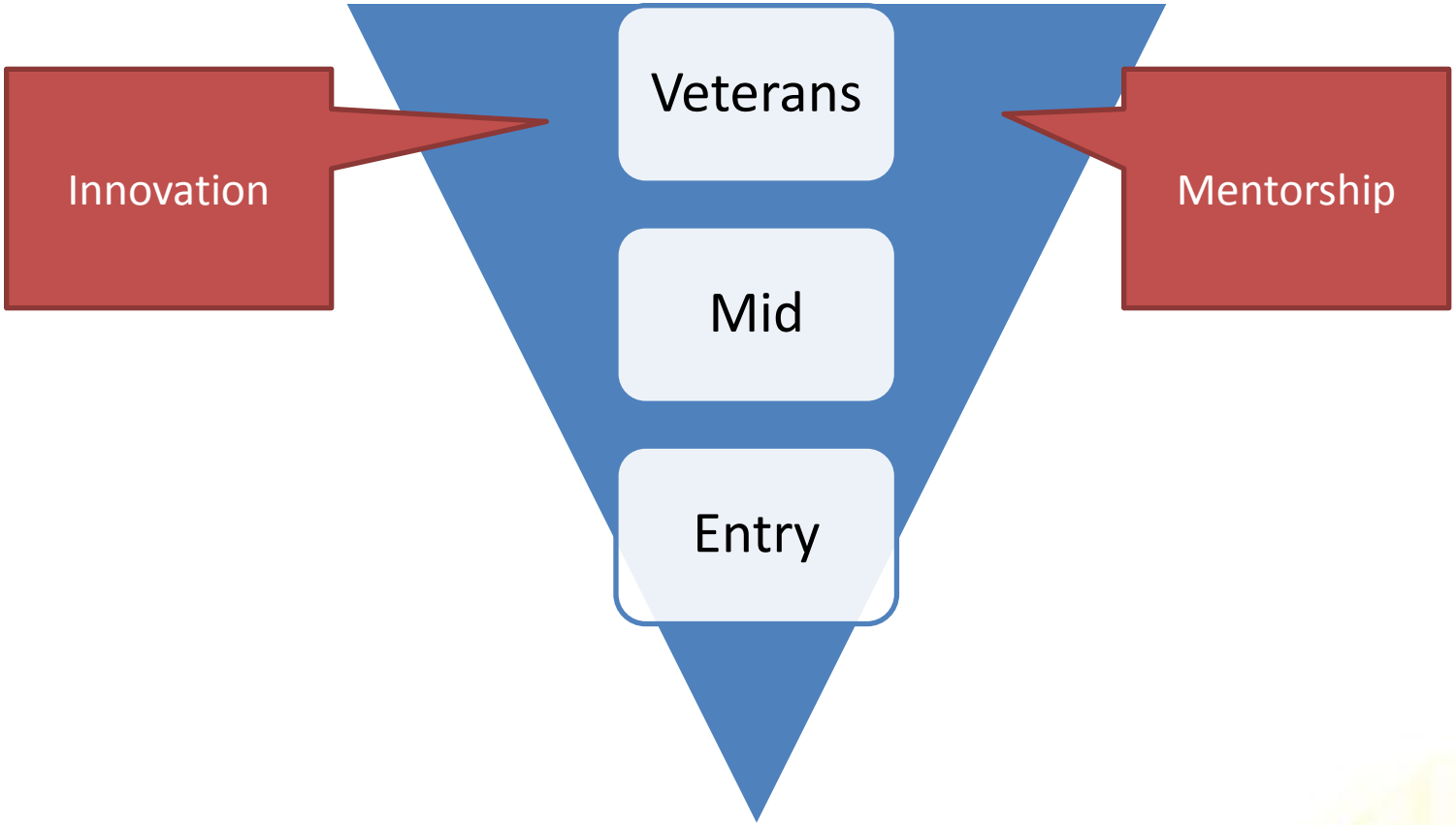
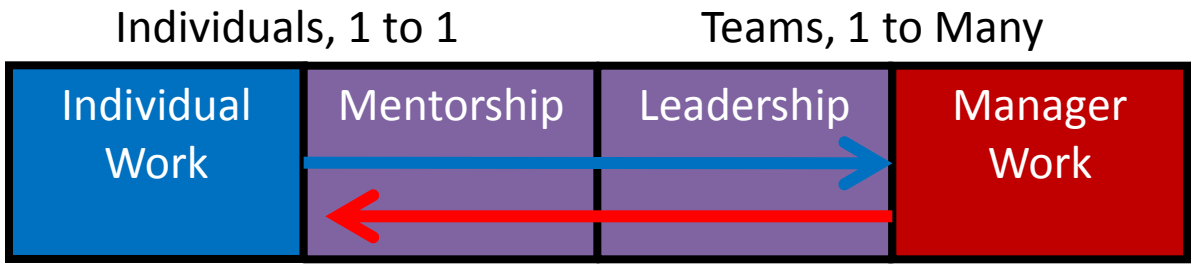


Why "The Amazing Society"

- **Amazing** individuals
  - Individual work, mentors, leaders
- Working as a team, a "**Society**"
  - Managers as leaders and mentors too



Intro Clip

MARVEL SUPER HERO SQUAD ONLINE

Marvel Super Hero Squad Online

THE PROJECT - GOALS

Bring Marvel to Kids

TV

Videogames

MARVEL SUPER HERO SQUAD

Toys

Hasbro

CARTOON NETWORK

GDC Online

Making Games for Kids

TARGET AUDIENCE

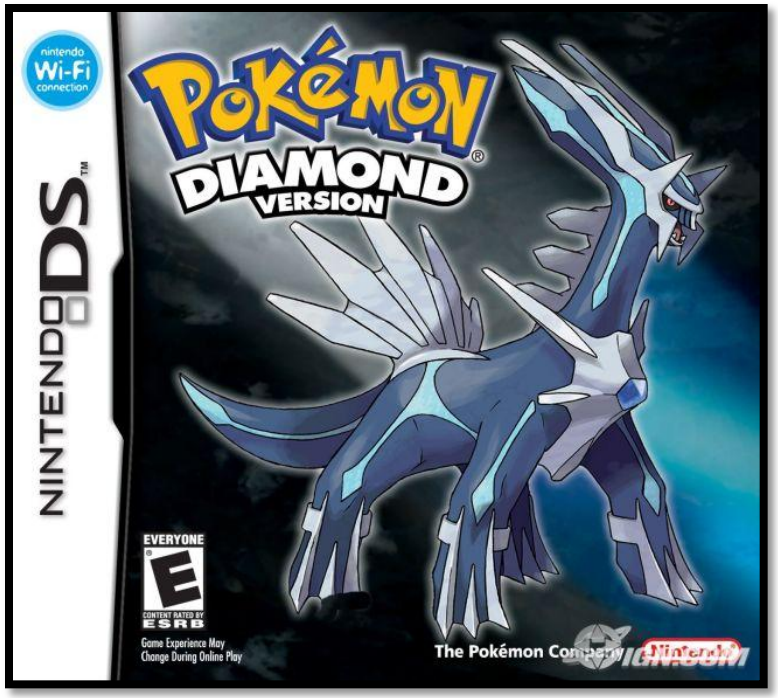
Boys: Ages 6 to 12

1st to 6th Grade

SUPER
STOCK
superstock.com

What are they Playing?

Pokemon - collection



Handheld Games

LEGO Star Wars
IP based co-operative combat

Console Games

Club Penguin
Online PC virtual worlds

Online PC Games

Secondary Target Audience

- Parents
- Crazy Fans

How Did We Do?

- 10 out of 4 (really)

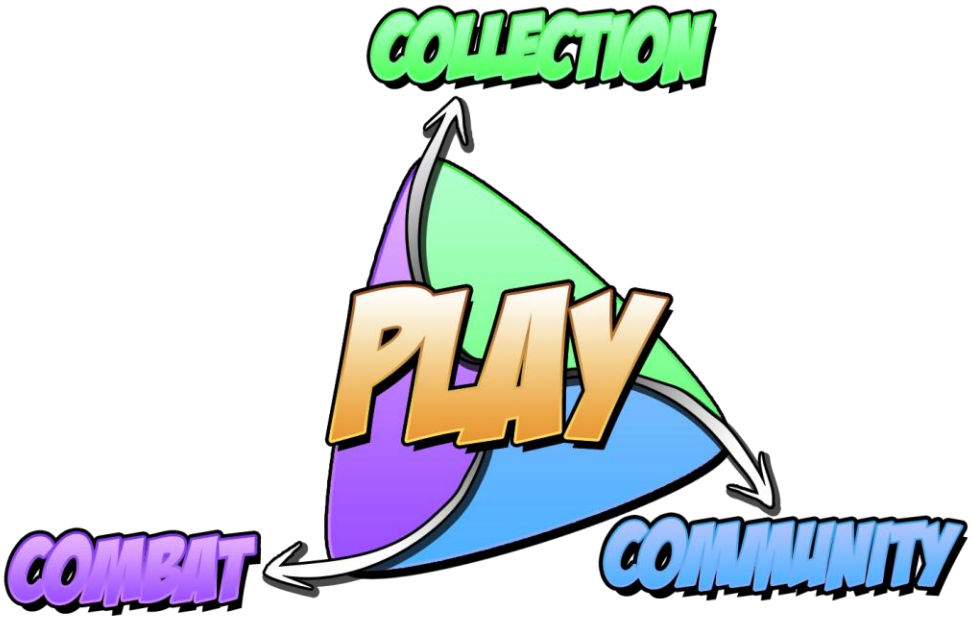
- GOOD - Continuous Focus and Usability Testing throughout pre-production and production
  - Every month we had kids come in and play
- BAD – Post Launch we lost this discipline until we got to Korea.

Easy for Kids, Fun for Grown Ups

GAME DESIGN

Be the Marvel Hero

Infuse Play Into Everything



Core Feature – Game World

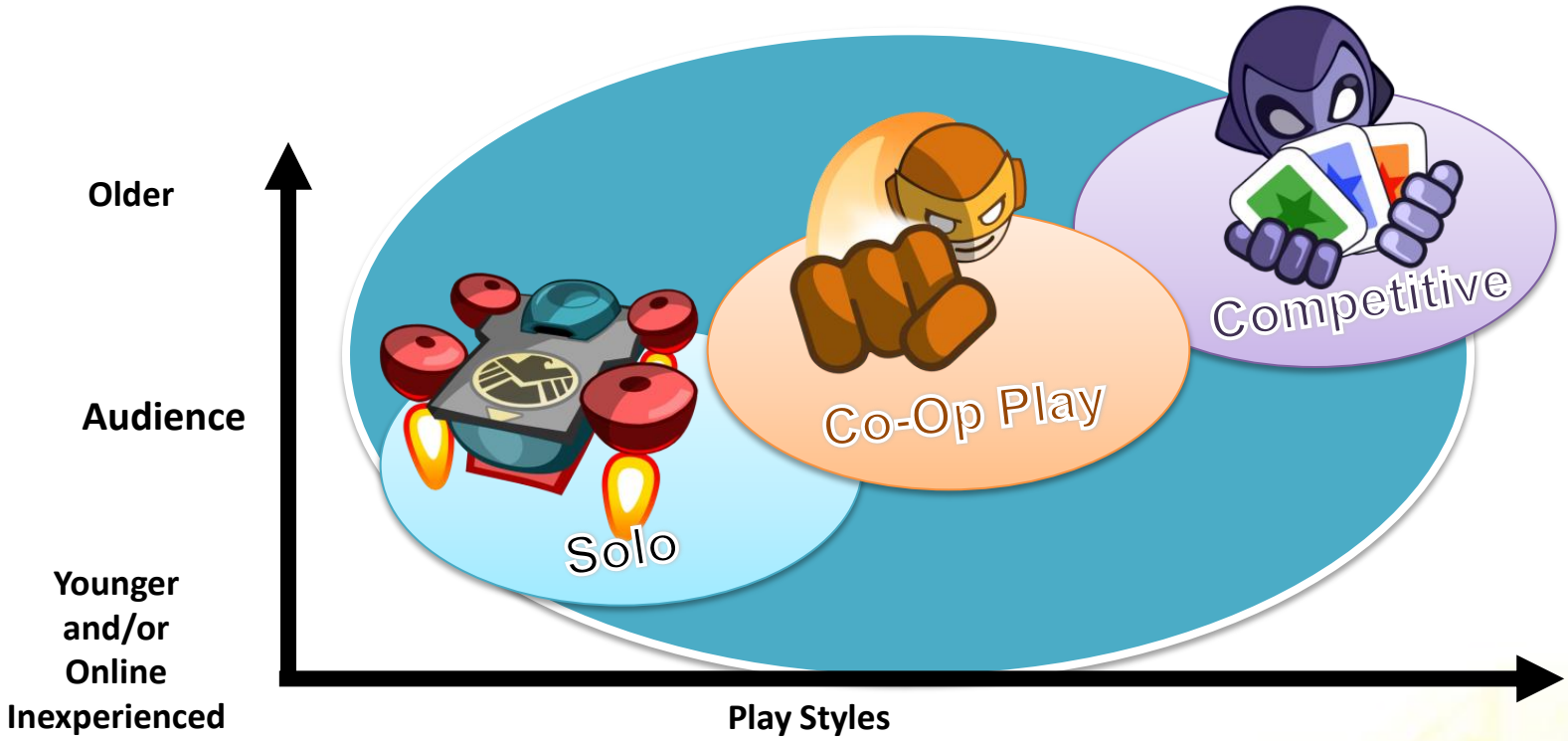
Core Features – Combat

- Team up to face off against iconic Marvel villains

Core Feature – Headquarters

Core Feature – Card Game

Range of play Styles



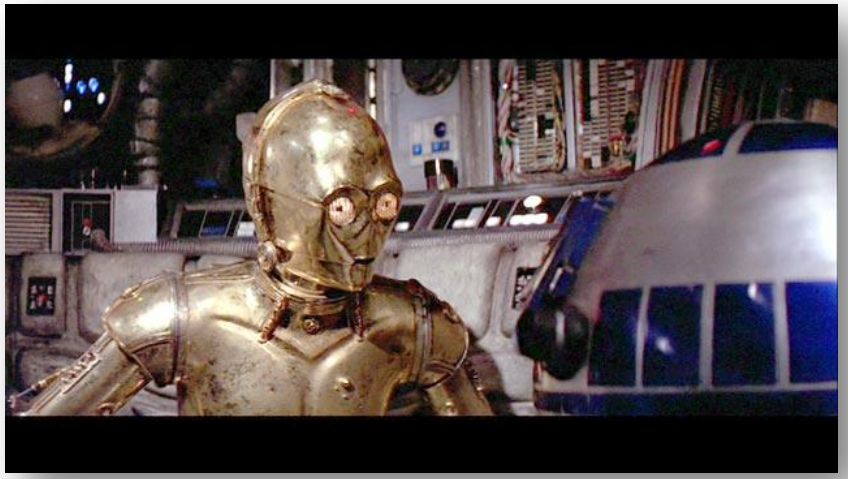
They want to succeed!

They can take failure *very* personally...

Impossible to Fail

MOTTO! - Let the Wookie Win

- If it's too easy for you, it's still to hard

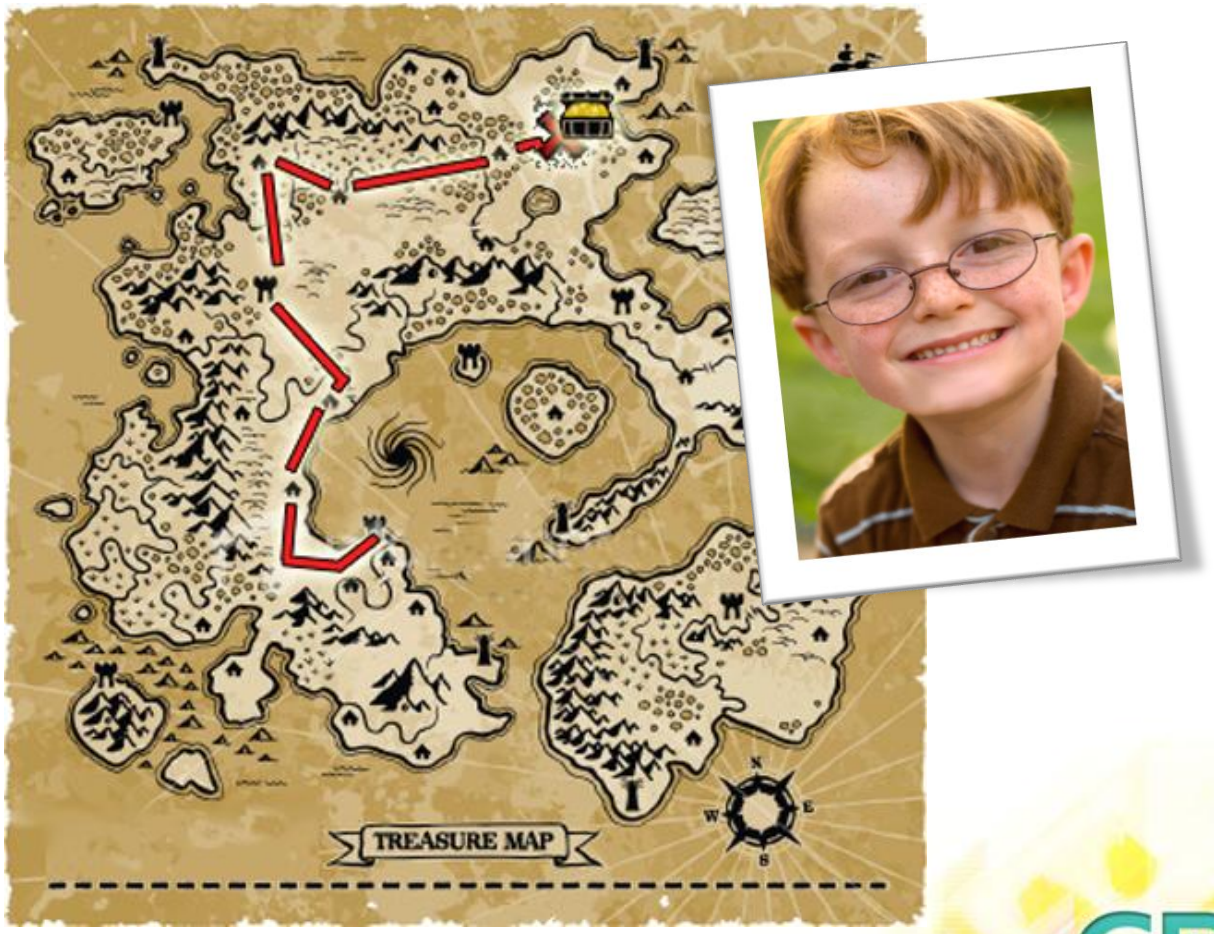


Easily lost without strong direction

Kids Love Repetition

Directing Kids to the Fun

Directing Kids to the Fun

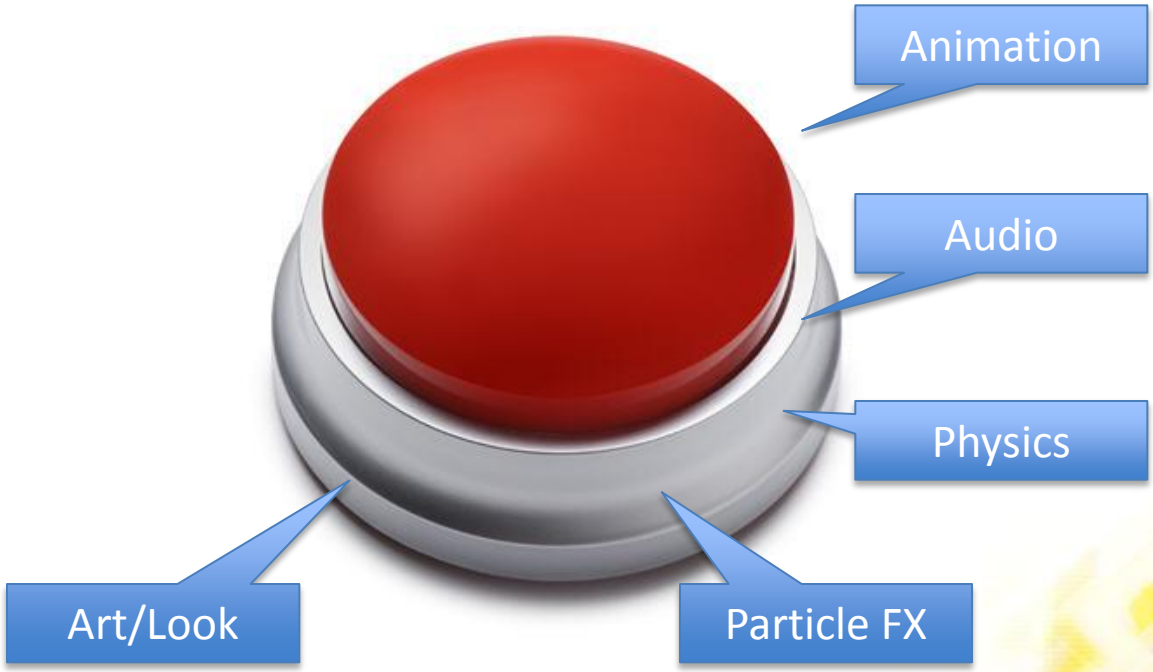


Short Play Sessions

Rapid Level Progression

MOTTO! - What Happens When You Push the Damn Button?

- 10,000 hour MMO is built one click at a time…
- Dagekikan



Monetization Design

Turns out there are people who hit this.

Hybrid Model

Subscription

- Monthly Gold
- Earn Gold Through Play
- Exclusive Characters
- Sneak Peeks

MTX

- Just buy some gold
- No item sales

How Did We Do?

- GOOD – Game is Monetizing. Hurray!
- GOOD – Age Demographic matches our guess
- BAD – Content is burning fast!
- BAD – Did not finish MTX by launch
- BAD – Unfinished Directed Play
- INTERESTING – Got the crazy fans who became our $500 customers. Vocal minority.

Fast to Market – Buy Not Build

TECHNOLOGY

Unity VS Lightspeed

Unity: 51

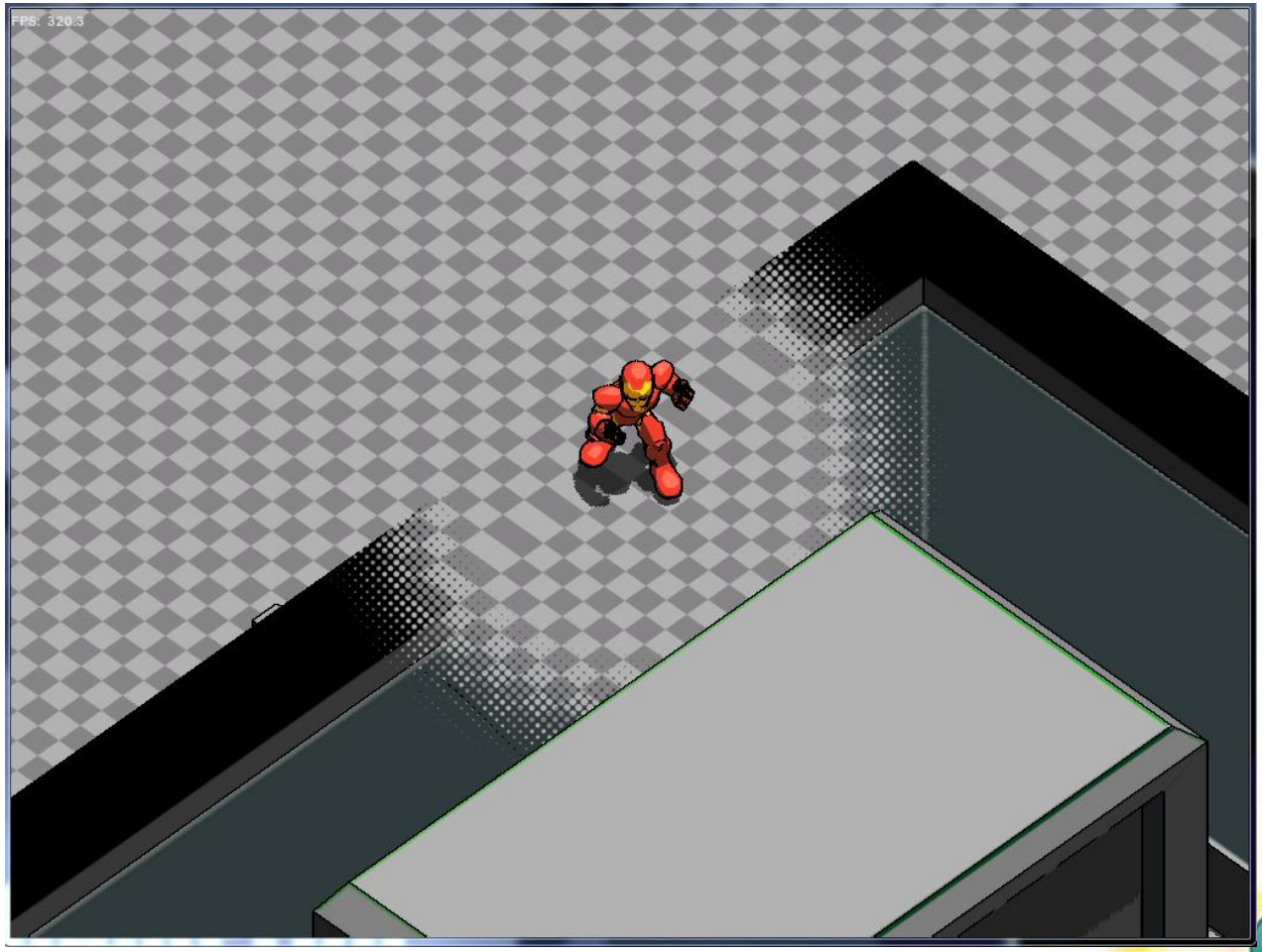
Lightspeed: 49

Picked Unity and had a game play demo up in 2 weeks.

Every game feature demoable in 6 weeks

Chose our benefits and problems

Demo



Unity Pros and Cons

Pros

- Awesome Tools
- Web Player
- Reasonable Price
- Future – iOS, Android, more

Cons

- UI
- Asset Server
- Waiting for Updates

Invisible Matchmaking

No Sharding
Friend List Focused

Turning Point

Web Embedded Only

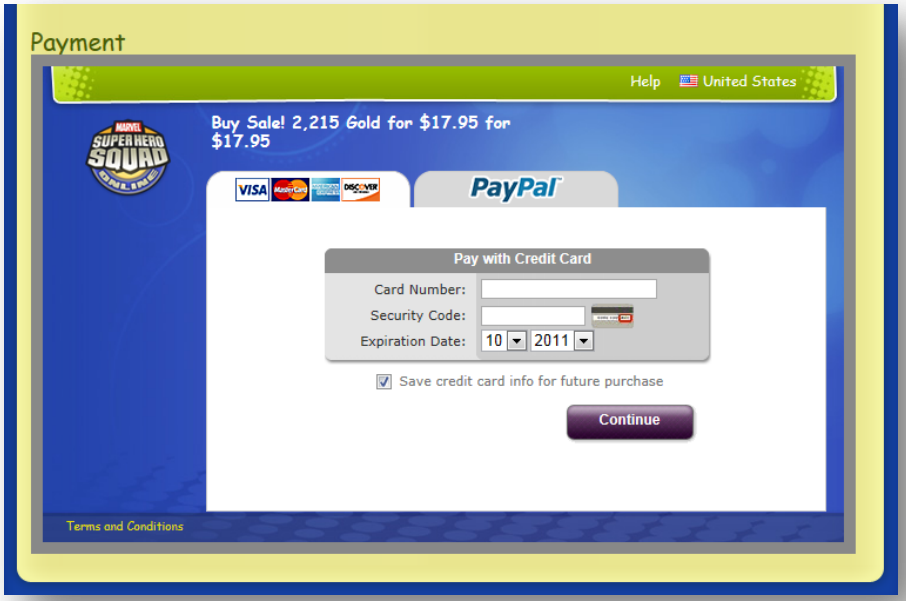
Vs

Standalone

- Unity Cache
- Full Screen
- Video Options

Platform & Web

- LOT Harder Than We Thought
- The Website IS a Part of the Game
- Integration with PlaySpan



How did we do?

- GOOD - Decision to go with Unity
- GOOD - Web ONLY, no standalone
- BAD – Underestimated Platform and Web
- BAD – Sub Only At Launch
- BAD – UI in Unity is very difficult
- BAD – Downtime for team managing 16GB of Data in Unity Asset Server

Most Important First 5 Seconds

ART CHOICES

Quick History of Art Choices

- Joy of established IP – Not a lot of messing around
- Technology considerations
- Capture the FUN!

GDC 11 Online

GDC 11
Online

WOOD?

DESIGN ETHICS + AESTHETICS
NEW DESIGN PRINCIPLES
HERITAGE
EMPIRICISM
OLD BRAIN
BUSINESS ETHICS
FEDERAL
SMALL CAUSES
BIG EFFECTS
GUIDING PRINCIPLES
BUSINESS DESIGN

DAILY BUGLE
IRON-MAN DEFEATS ARMINATION
RAID ON VILLAINVILLE
BLAM!
21/50
UI: CURRENT CARTOON MOTIF INSPIRED
MICROGAME: 2D VERSION OF 3D
CHARACTERS: BASED AS CLOSELY ON THE SHOW AS POSSIBLE
MARVEL SUPER HERO SQUAD
ENVIRONMENTS: SIMPLE TEXTURES, FORMS TO MATCH THE SHOW
EFFECTS: CELL SHADED AND EMISSIVE

EFFECTS: GRAPHIC SHAPES 1970S

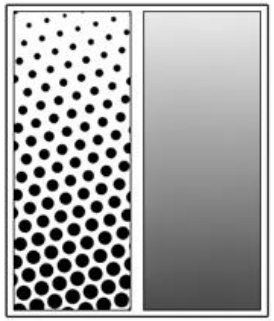
MICROGAMES: CASTLE CRASHER STYLE

UI: GOOGIE FORM 1970S

CHARACTERS: 2 TONE SIMPLE SHADED WITH NOW DETAIL TEXTURES AND NO SPECULAR

ENVIRONMENTS: SIMPLE, STRAIGHT LINE BACKGROUNDS

ENVIRONMENTS:
•COMIC INSPIRED
•LOW DETAIL TEXTURES
•BLACK OUTLINE
(PROBABLY NOT THIS DRAMATIC)



EFFECTS:
•COMIC PANELS
•HALF TONE EFFECTS
•BLACK FILL TOON SHADING

MICROGAMES:
•PUSH COMIC LOOK EVEN FURTHER
•B&W PANELS AND COLOR PANELS

CHARACTERS:
•VARIABLE WIDTH OUTLINE
•BLACK OUTLINE REFLECTION
•BLACK FILL TOON SHADING

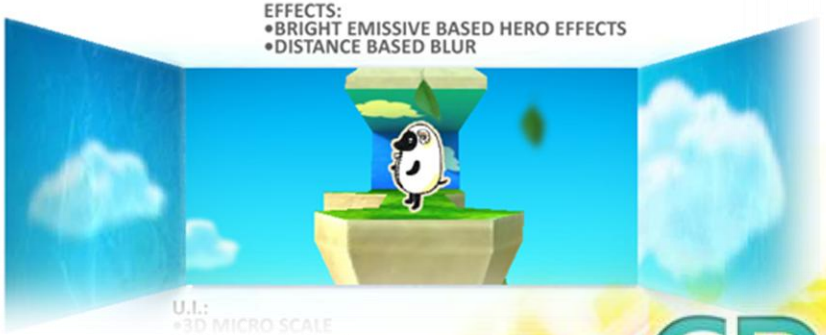
UI:
•COMIC PANELS
•HALF TONE EFFECTS
•TEXT FORMS

ENVIRONMENTS:
•AMBIENT OCLUSION MAPS
•STYLIZED FORMS

CHARACTERS:
•AMBIENT OCLUSION MAPS
•SOLID TONE SIMPLE TEXTURES

MICROGAMES.:
•SOLID TONE VECTOR STYLE

EFFECTS:
•BRIGHT EMISSIVE BASED HERO EFFECTS
•DISTANCE BASED BLUR



U.I.:
•3D MICRO SCALE

AMBIENT OCCLUSION

COMIC BOOK

SIMPLE TOON SHADE

FLAT COLOR

SMASH

SMASH

SLAM!

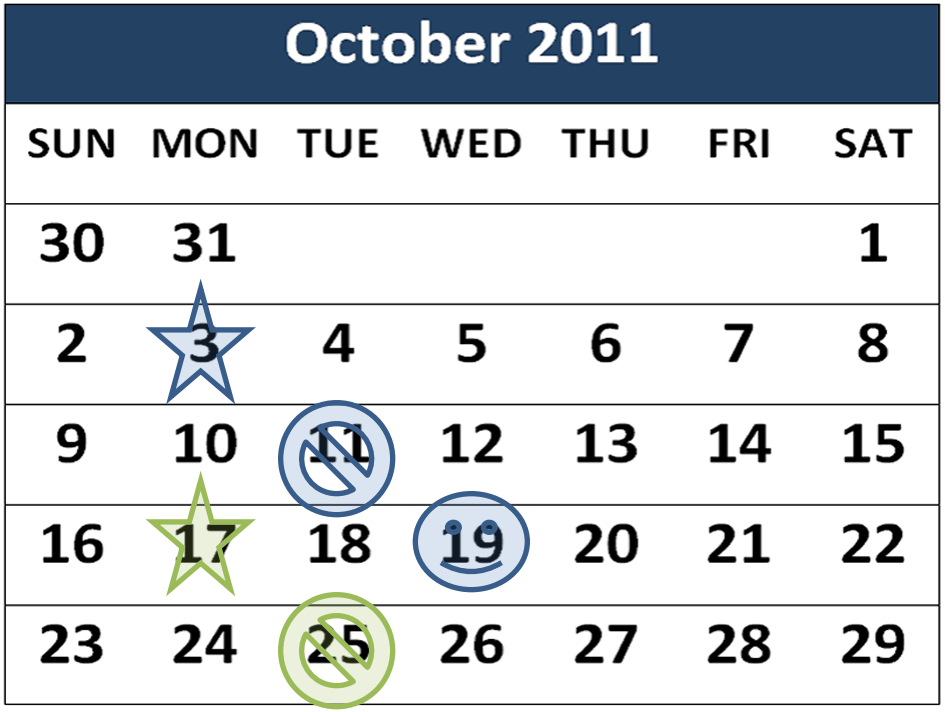
How Did We Do?

- GOOD – Beautiful game, awesome animations, happy customers
- GOOD – Marvel Team and Fans very happy with the look
- GOOD – Game works fine on low end machines
- BAD – Burned time on art driven features that ended up only for the highest end machines

AGILE PRODUCTION

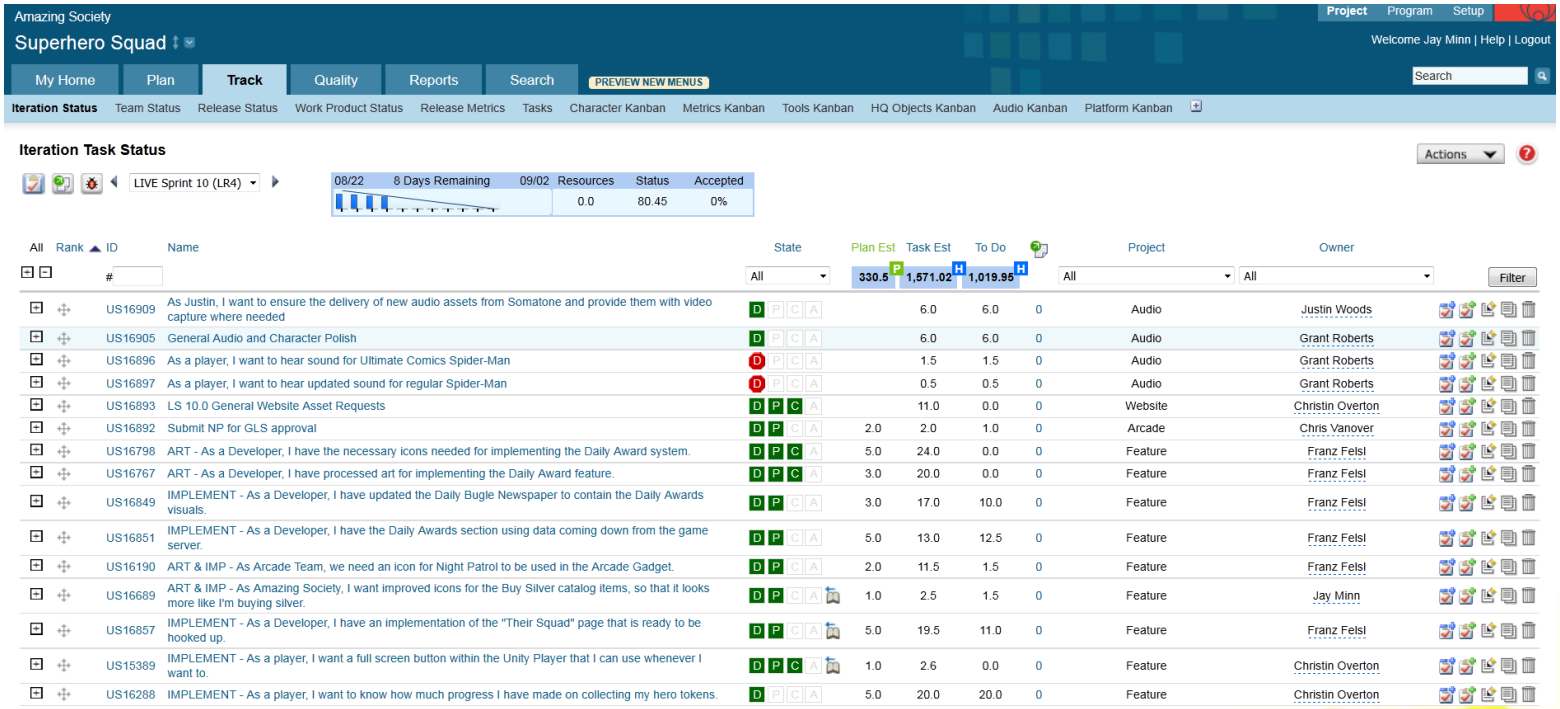
Discipline of Scrum

- 2 Week Sprints
- Epics for the Quarter
- 50 Sprints to Launch
- Small teams
- Take the time for the overhead
  - Planning
  - Sprint Reviews
  - Retrospectives



Stickies and Excel Not Good Enough

- Rally Software FTW!



MOTTO! - Fail Fast

- Failing is fine but please have the courtesy to do it quickly

Rebooting a Sprint

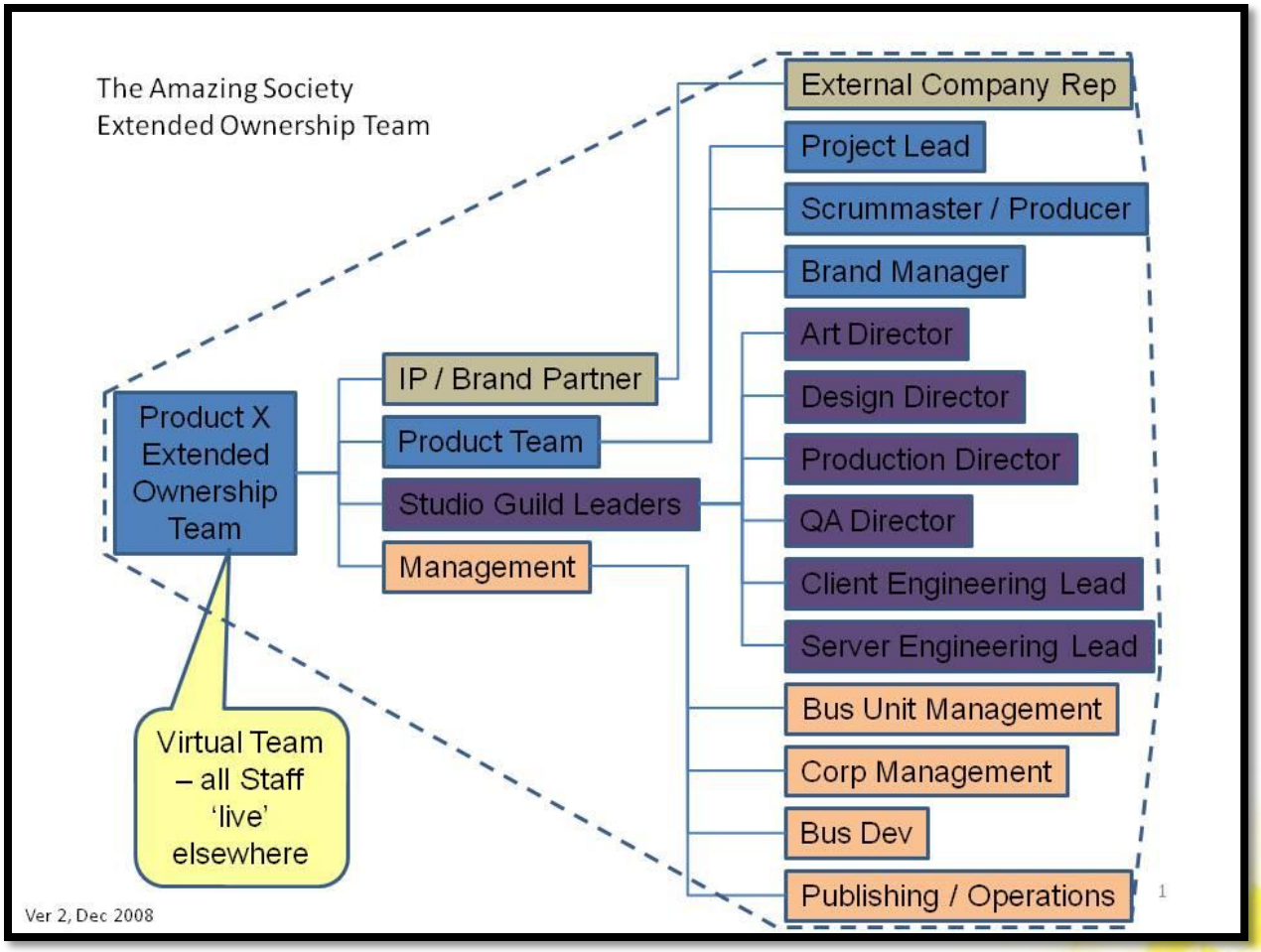
- Very painful
- Only happened a handful of times
- Major pivoting of resources to deal with "catastrophes"

- Team decides this!

MOTTO! - I'm Not Good Enough For Me

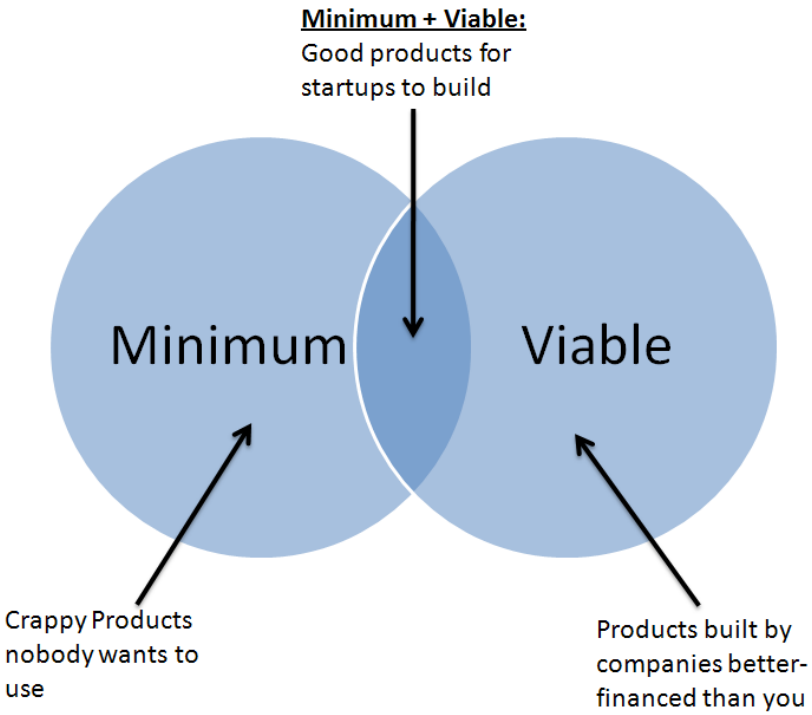
- Everybody is a movie director
- Everybody is a composer
- Everybody is an architect
- Everybody is a game designer

Extended Product Owner Team



MOTTO! – Ship The MVP then Iterate

- Minimum
- Viable
- Product



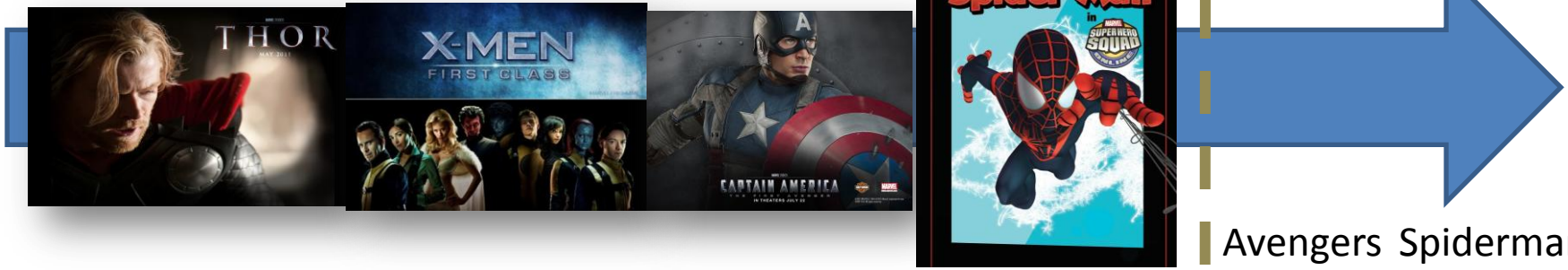
Get something out and then iterate

Launch

MOTTO! - We Ship We Win

- Turns out it takes a bit of time.
- Not a Field of Dreams
- Must have Marketing & Distribution

Marvel Consumer Events After Game Launch



Avengers May 12

Spiderman 4 Summer 2012

Our online events and expansions to mirror the 2011/12 movies and events of the Marvel brand

ASGARD

X-Men

Captain America

Spider-Man Month

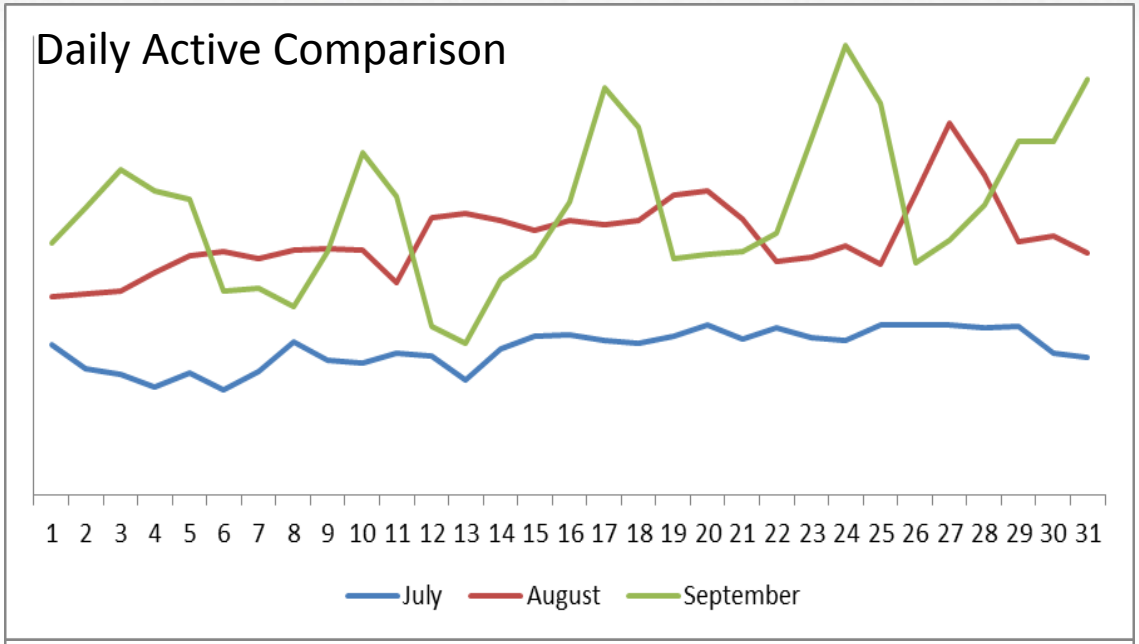
The Game Today

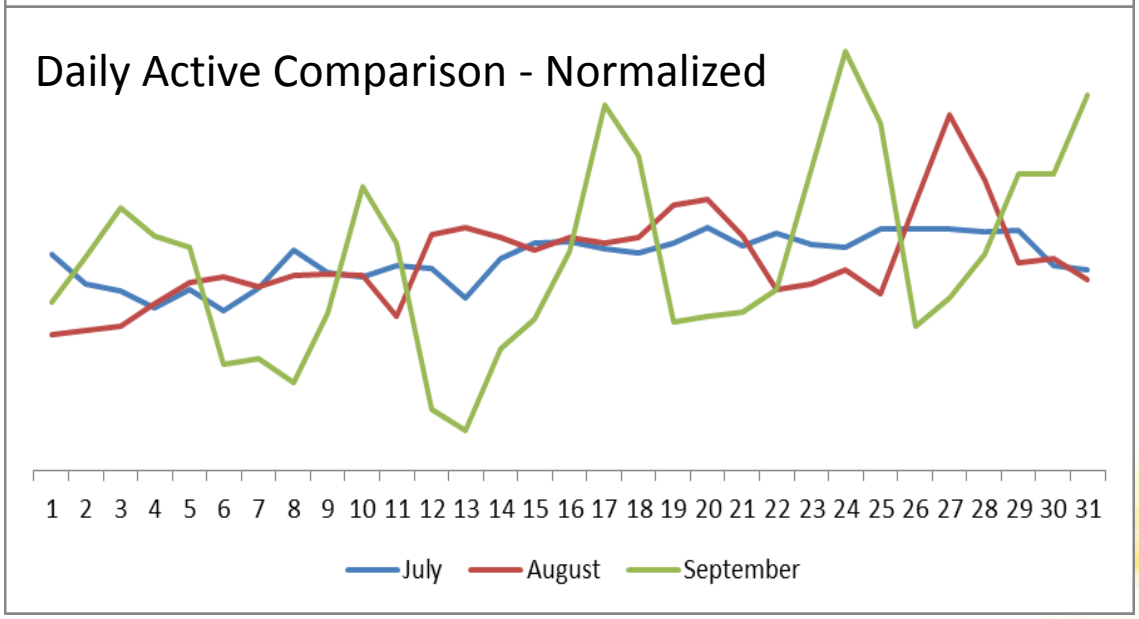
How Did We Do?

- GOOD - We got the game live!
- GOOD – Hit the media beats for all major summer movies and new Spider-Man
- GOOD – Kids know names of even obscure Marvel heroes after playing the game
- BAD – We lost the discipline of Priority Poker post launch in exchange for Rapid Response
- BAD – Rush to hit Movie times made us release critical bugs

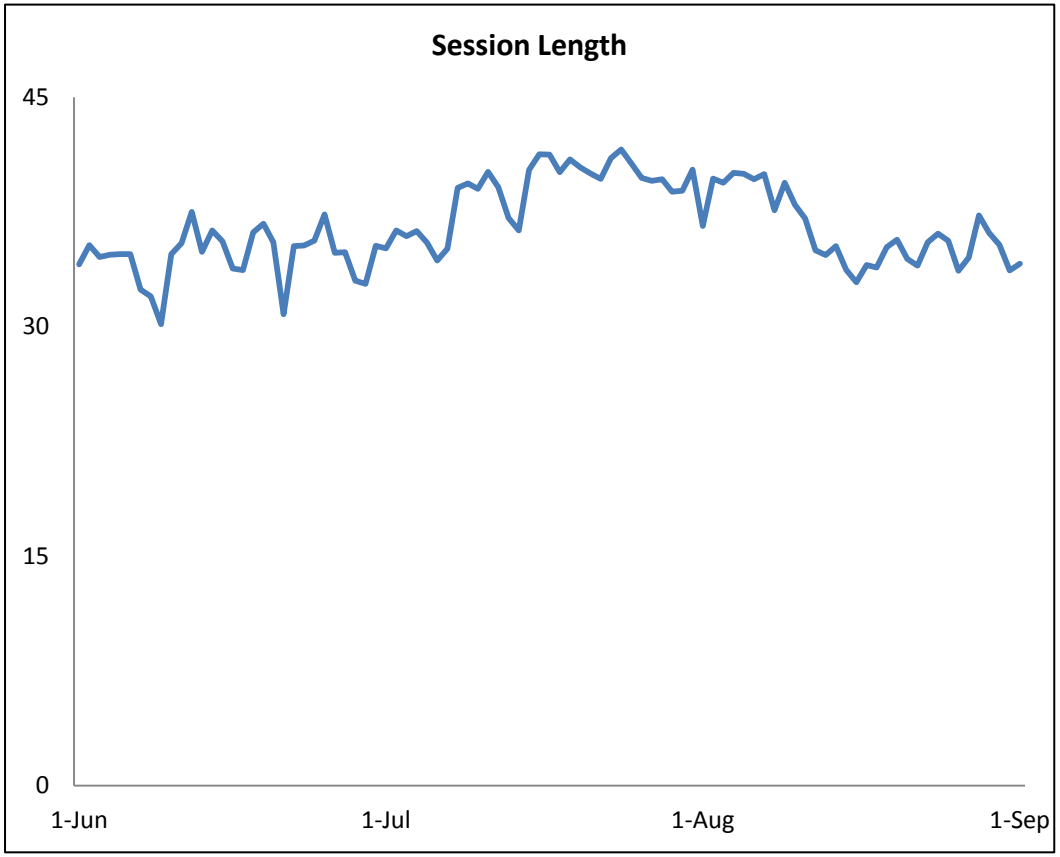
Metrics

WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW?

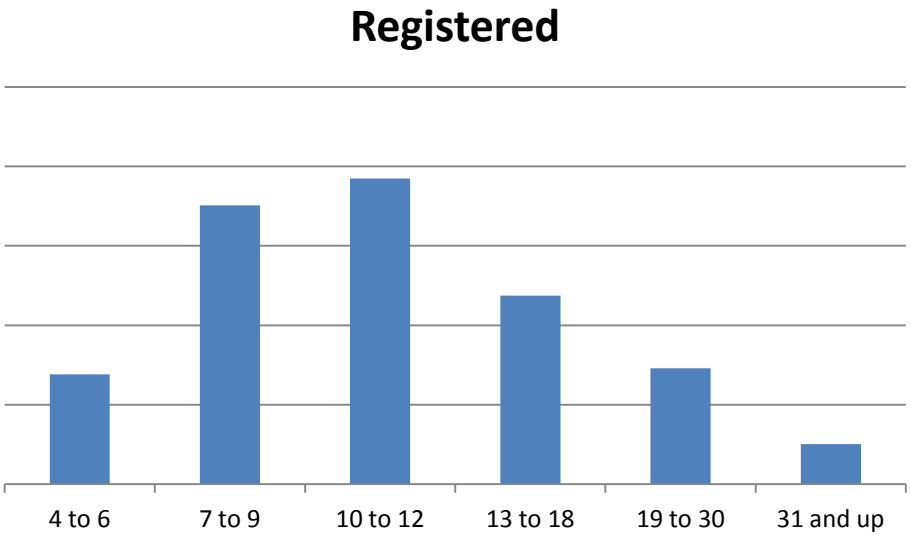


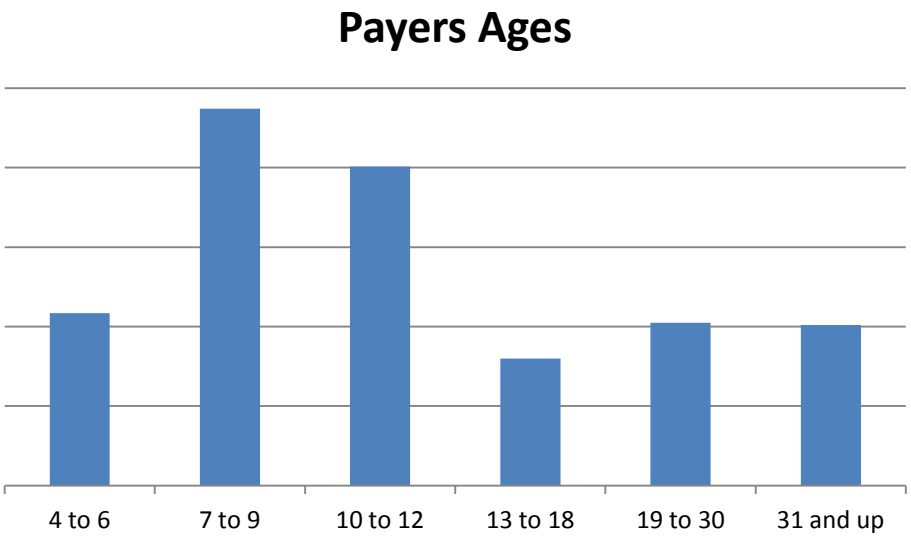


Summer vs.
Back to School
Saturday peaks


Session Length
45
30
15
0
1-Jun
1-Jul
1-Aug
1-Sep

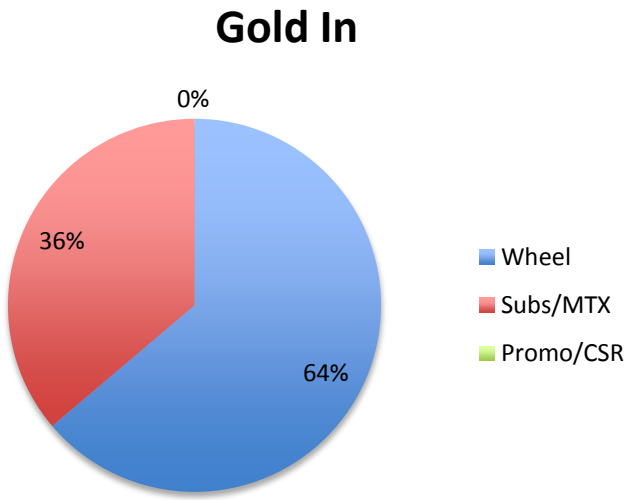
Post Launch Demographics

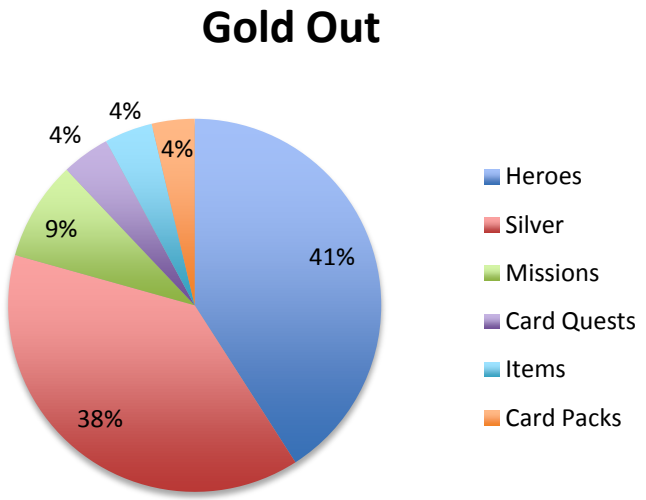




- Adults have higher conversion rate.
- Children and teens have higher active rate and make up the bulk of all paid users.

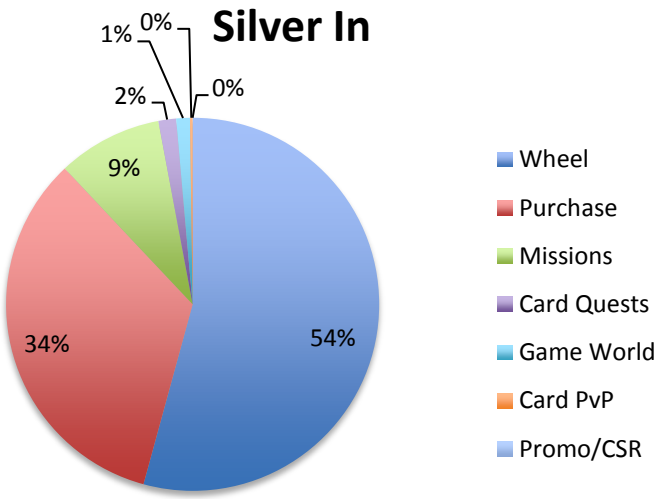
Gold Economy

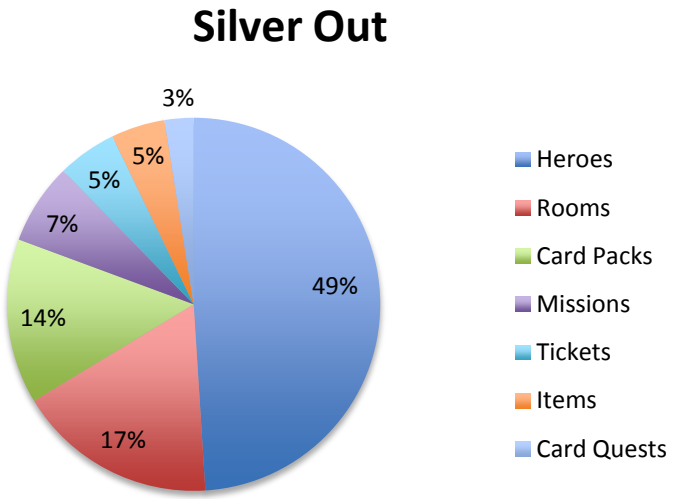




- Subs/MTX share up 3%
- 38% of all gold converted to silver

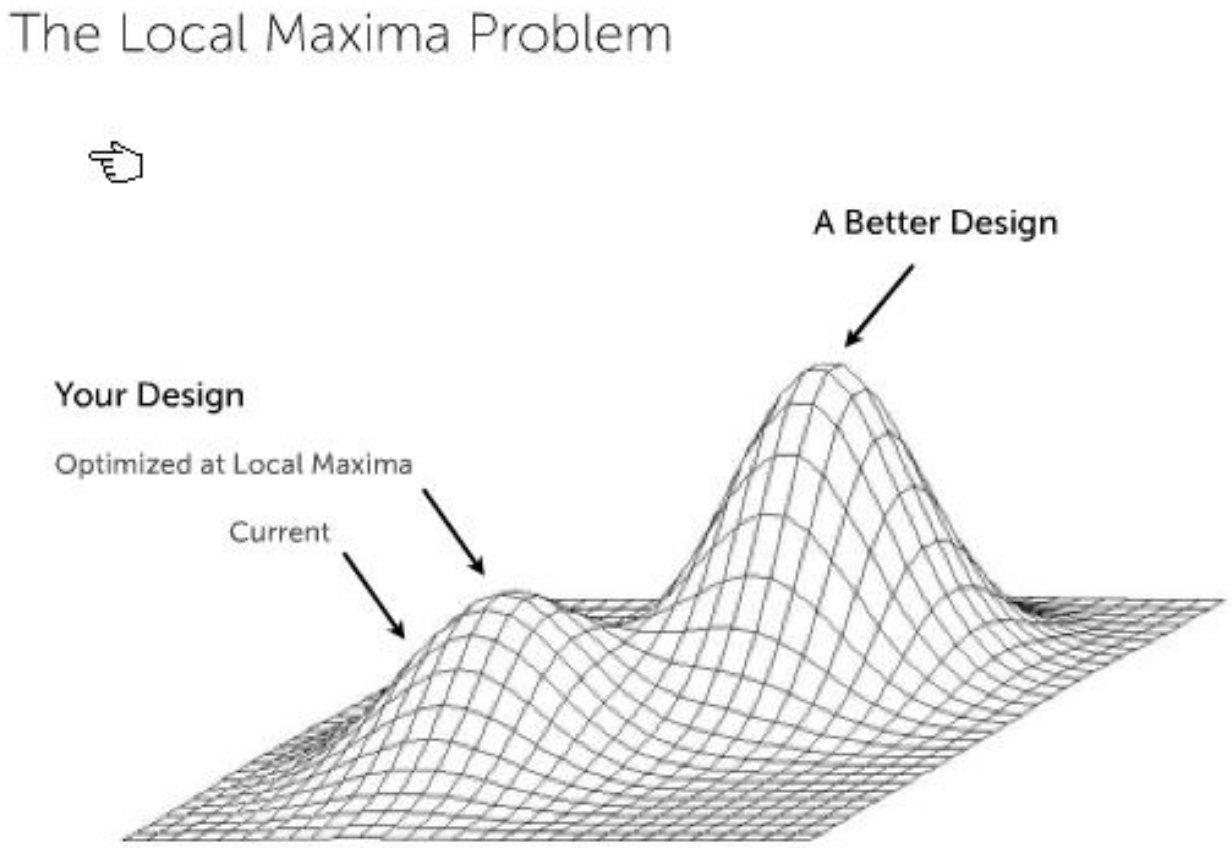
Silver Economy





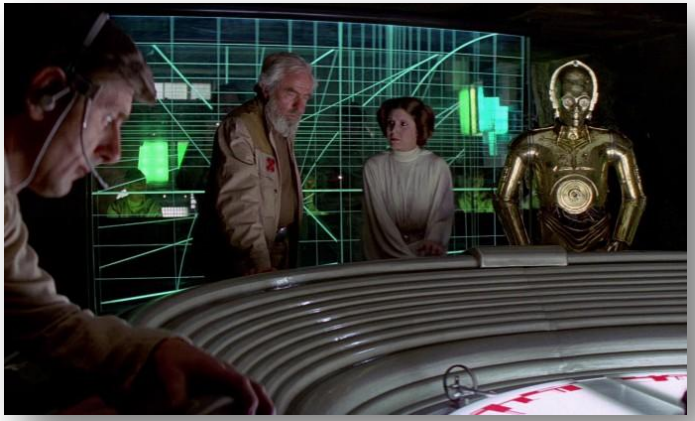
- 34% of all silver purchased with gold
- Hero share up 14% as users used the bulk of purchased silver to buy silver heroes

Don’t Lose Your Mojo!

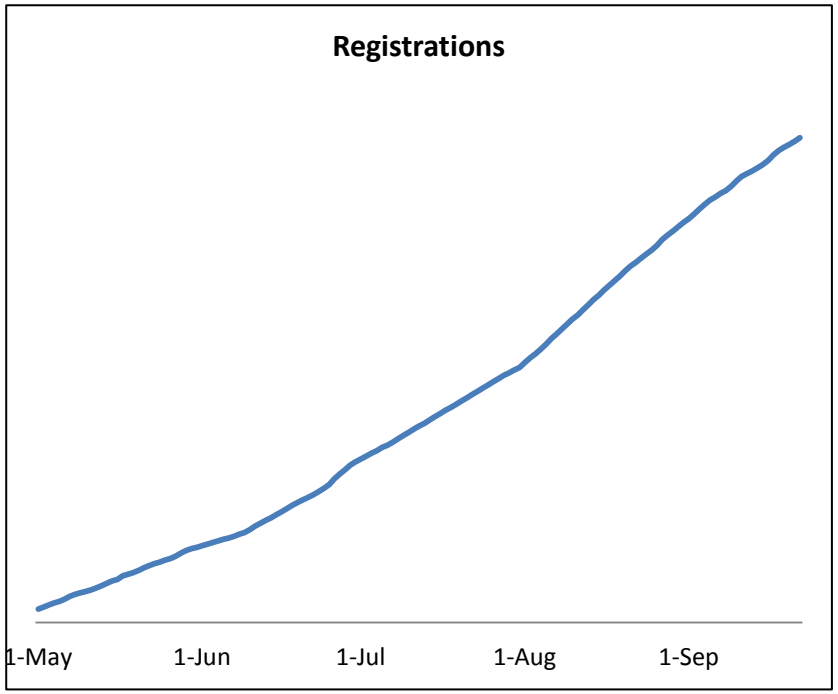


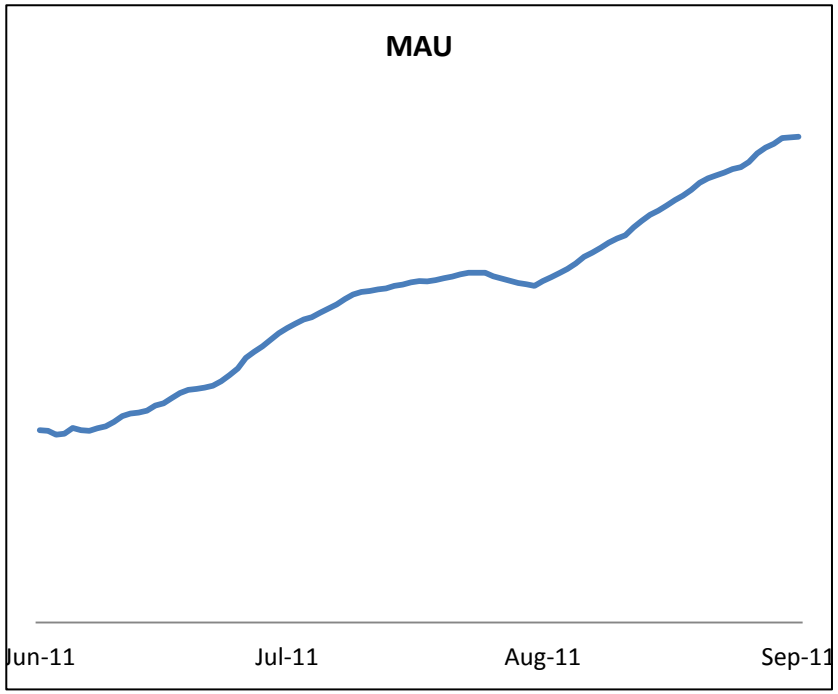
Trust Your Feelings…

Using the Force



Management is worried…


Registrations
1-May
1-Jun
1-Jul
1-Aug
1-Sep


MAU
Jun-11
Jul-11
Aug-11
Sep-11

How Did We Do?

- GOOD - Discipline of Metrics Driven Development
- GOOD – Increasing growth rates
- BAD – Where is time for iteration?
- BAD - We stopped talking about FUN!

Continuing Operations

FUTURE OF SQUAD

Halloween!

Psionic Emperor
Squad Level: 885
BLACK CAT
MAX
Buy Gold!
WOLVERINE
BLACK CAT
0/5
Tokens

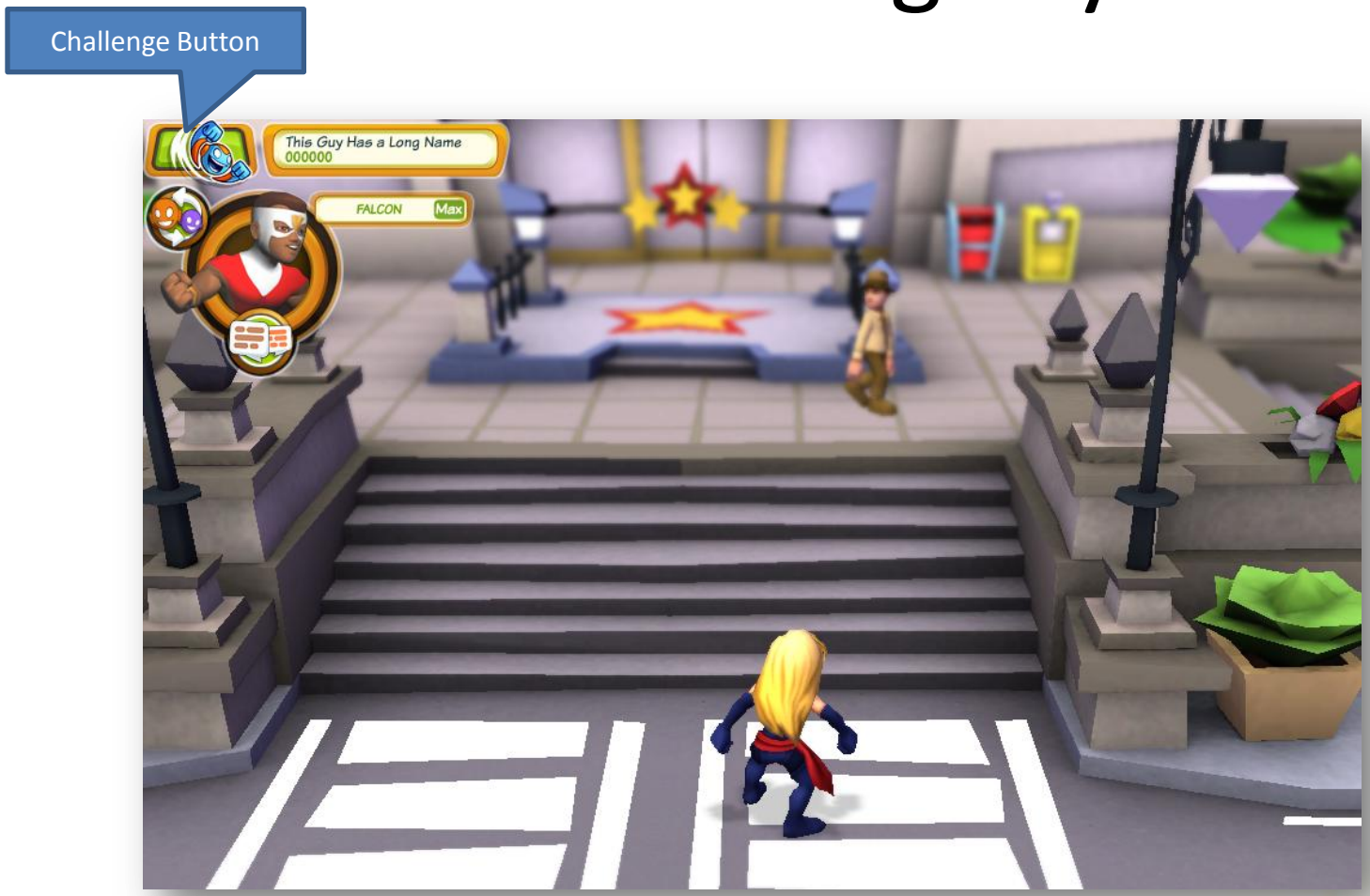
Halloween!

Psionic Emperor
Squad Level: 885
BLACK CAT
MAX
Buy Gold!
Psionic Emperor
BLACK CAT
1/5
Tokens

Halloween!

Psionic Emperor
Squad Level: 885
BLACK CAT
MAX
Buy Gold!
1/5
Tokens

New Challenge System



Complete Challenges

9 FREE Heroes as Rewards

Eventually Players will Earn them All

GDC 11
Online

AND MANY MANY MORE!

AND MANY MANY MORE!

THANK YOU!!!!

QUESTIONS?