



# Running Effective Soft Launches

*How to save the games that can be saved*

Dylan Tredrea  
Head of Publishing @ Zeptolab

**GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE**

MARCH 18-22, 2019 | #GDC19



# About Me

- Internship at f2p platform in 2005(!)
- Product @ Disney
- BI @ Geewa
- Product @ Rovio
- Now Head of Publishing at Zeptolab

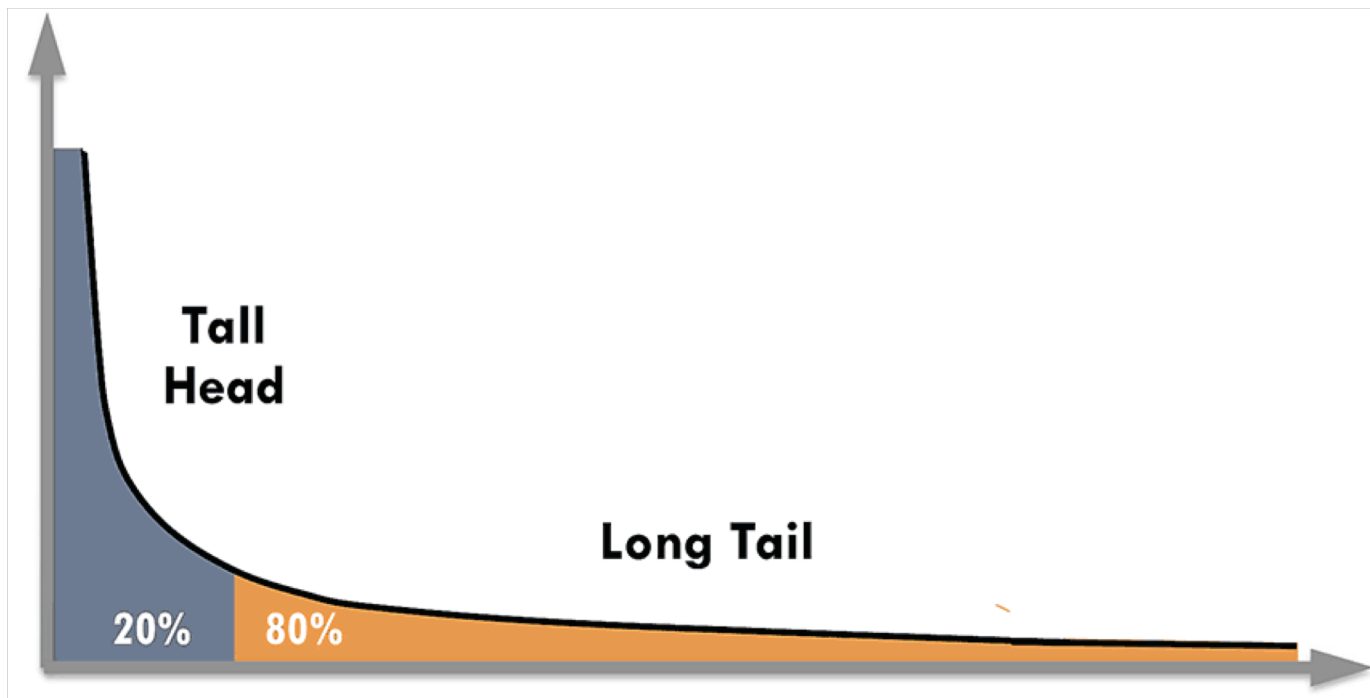
Too many free to play mobile games 'die' in soft launch because game teams don't appreciate how different a soft launch is from regular live operations.

# Talk Goals

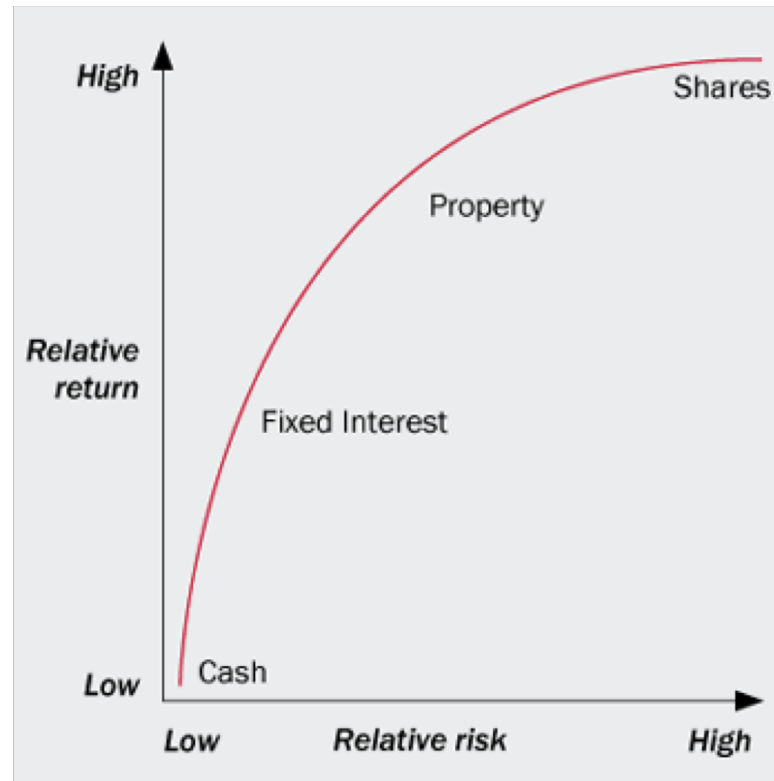
- Understand 'rules' of F2P
- Best strategy for playing F2P 'game' in SL
- How to prepare & plan for soft launch
- How to make product/priority decisions in soft launch
- How to incorporate qualitative feedback into decision making
- How to manage risks (aka, respect players while still staying in business)



# #1: Power Law Outcomes



## #2: Risk & Reward are Related



# Exceptions/Best Practices

- IAP Prices: 50% & 150%
- Difficulty: much easier & much more difficult

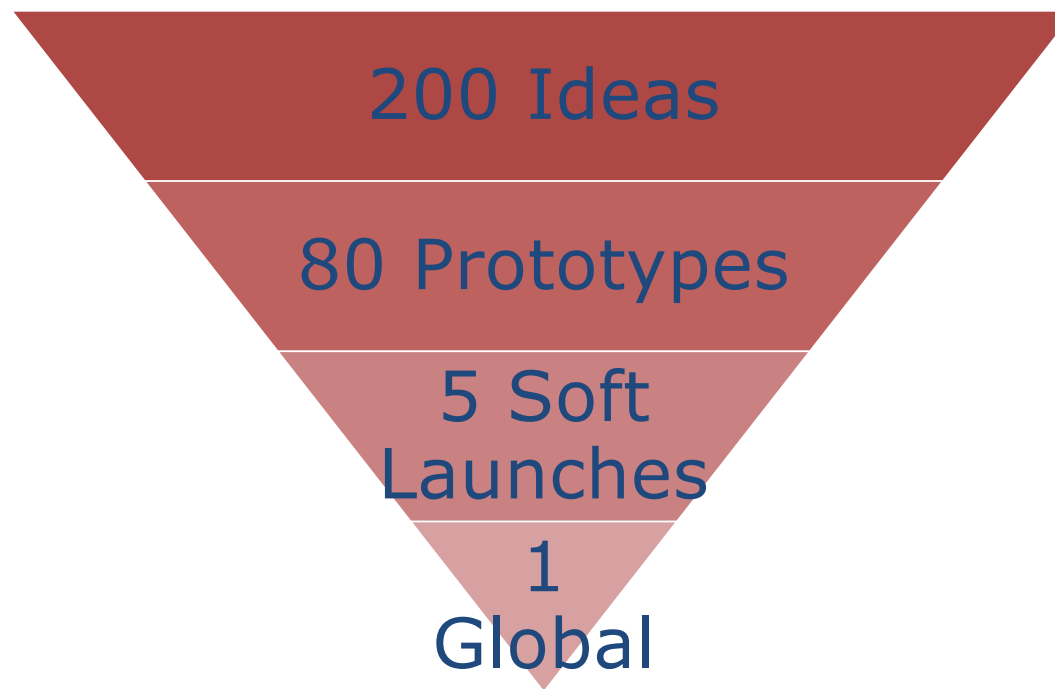
# #3: You **can** break the game in SL



## #4: Learnings Accumulate



# #5: A global launch 'costs' several Soft launches



# The Game of Games

GDC

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE  
MARCH 18-22, 2019 | #GDC19

# So the rules of the game..

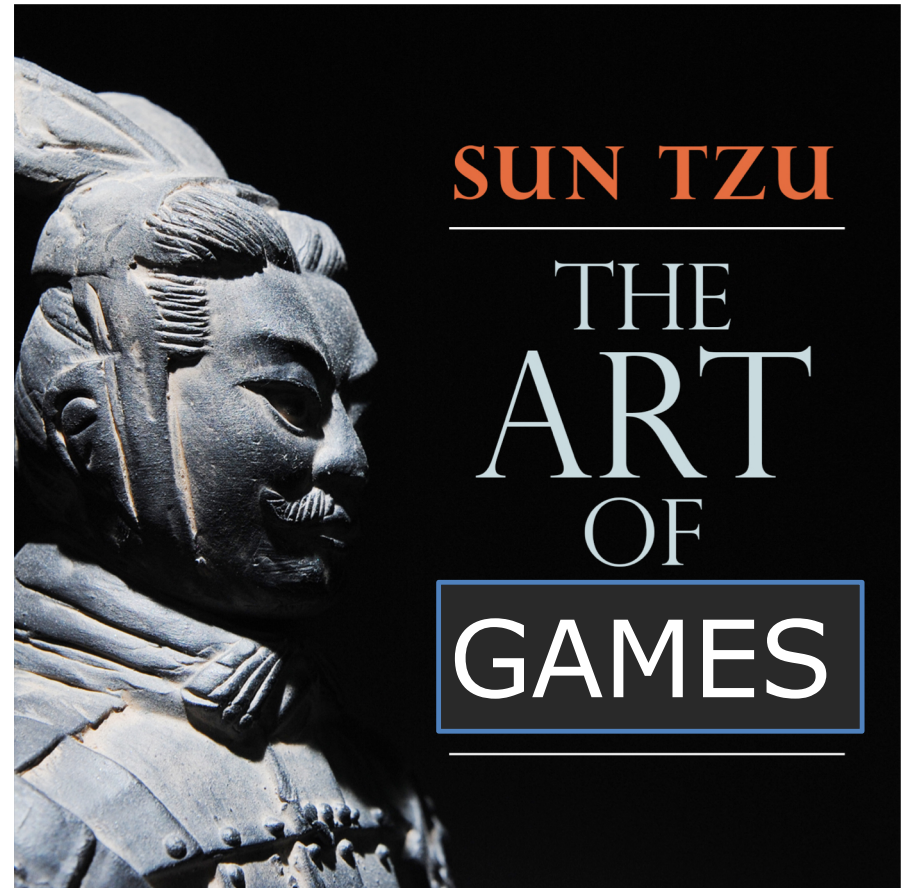
- Power law outcomes
- High risk->higher rewards
- Learnings accumulate
- Near zero\* downside
- Most soft launches fail

....

How do we play this game? What's the dominate strategy for success?



Make as many big,  
deep, and DISTINCT  
changes in soft  
launch as possible



# Soft Launch Planning

# When to soft launch?

NOW!!



# Alpha Launch

- Basically a polished prototype to measure CPI & D1
- Validate audience match, appeal of core gameplay



# Territories & Platforms

- Add territories liberally
- Consider: how far away are you from KPI goals?
- Avoid territories used to localization
- Android only at first



# Prep Starts on Day 1

Keep track of:

- Big, deep design options
- Risks
- Questions





# Server Side Controls

- Every number, parameter, string, etc.
- Features have on/off flags



# Never waste a user!





# Product Level Decisions

# What if D1 >40%

- Clear contender, but still a long way to go!
- Still do some core mechanic tests (faster/slower, easier...)
- But quickly move on to progression & long term features

# What if D1 30-40%

- Ok to spend a 1-2 months to fix
- But high likelihood the game will not improve
- Try some big changes (controls, difficulty, speed, even type of gameplay)

# What if $D1 > 20\%$

- Spend weeks trying to fix
- Possible there is a tech issue, or game is way, way too difficult
- But if not, should be killed immediately

But really

It depends



**GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE**

MARCH 18–22, 2019 | #GDC19

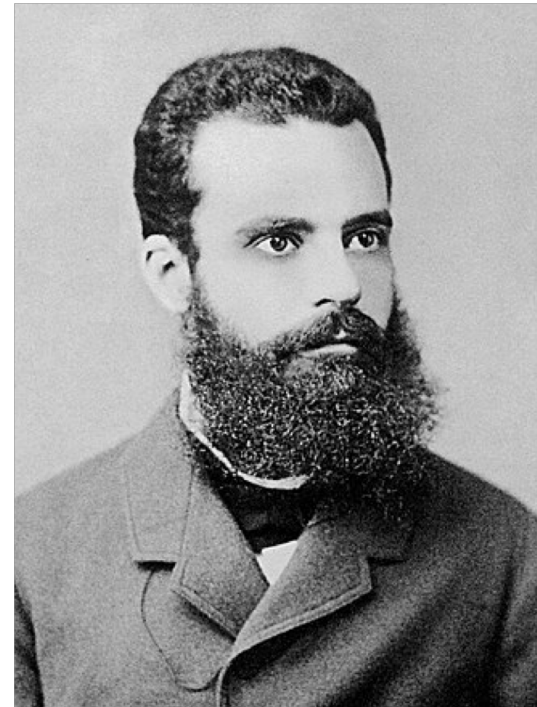
# Retention

- Backbone of the business case
- Really, really difficult to improve without big changes



# SHIP MVPs

- Don't waste time with perfect art: ship MVPs!
- 20% of the design will have 80% of the impact!



# High Risk/High Reward Ops

- Don't wait to measure things perfectly!
- Instead of waiting to measure D30, look at the 'fun factor' (ratio of D3:D1; D7:D1)
- Higher P Value for tests



# Perhaps Most Importantly: Distinct Changes

A proper product process is hypothesis, not data, driven

Don't spent too much time on something unless it's a pillar or there is clear lift.

# Don't be Vestigial

- C.A.T.S. had a sabotage feature
- Wasn't being used
- So we cut it!

# Nothing is for nothing

- So few efforts having an impact is frustrating
- But if well run, nothing will be for nothing

# Qualitative Feedback

# Support & Community



- Highly valued team members
- Regular, standardized reports
- Must be put in context
- Not always reliable data!

# Risk Management & Respecting players

# Tool Set

- **Near zero risk doesn't mean near zero responsibility!**
- MVP: Send all players X amount of hard currency with a custom text message *"sorry our balance messed up the last event, here's 100 gems!"*

# Operations Tips

- Communicate whenever possible: *'We're trying X for a week, let us know what you think!'*
- End successful soft launches with a big gift of hard currency
- End unsuccessful soft launches gracefully with hard currency gifts & 1-2 months to use bought/gifted currency



# Leadership Support



# Summary

- Soft launch ASAP (if you're not nervous- you waited too long)
- Prepare operations, back end controls, and soft launch plans to max out your ability to learn
- Don't waste time with small changes, (almost) try to break the game with high risk experiments
- Work closely w/ CS & CM
- Always. Be. Learning.
- Great soft launches only happen with full leadership support