# Meaningful Marketability Testing: Avoiding Pitfalls and Preventing Costly Mistakes

Presented by **Diana Maher**
Spring 2023

About myself

- Over a decade of experience in marketing

- Focused in Mobile Games User Acquisition for 7+ years

- Covered full game life cycle:

  - From testing new game ideas & prototypes

  - Soft-launches & global launches

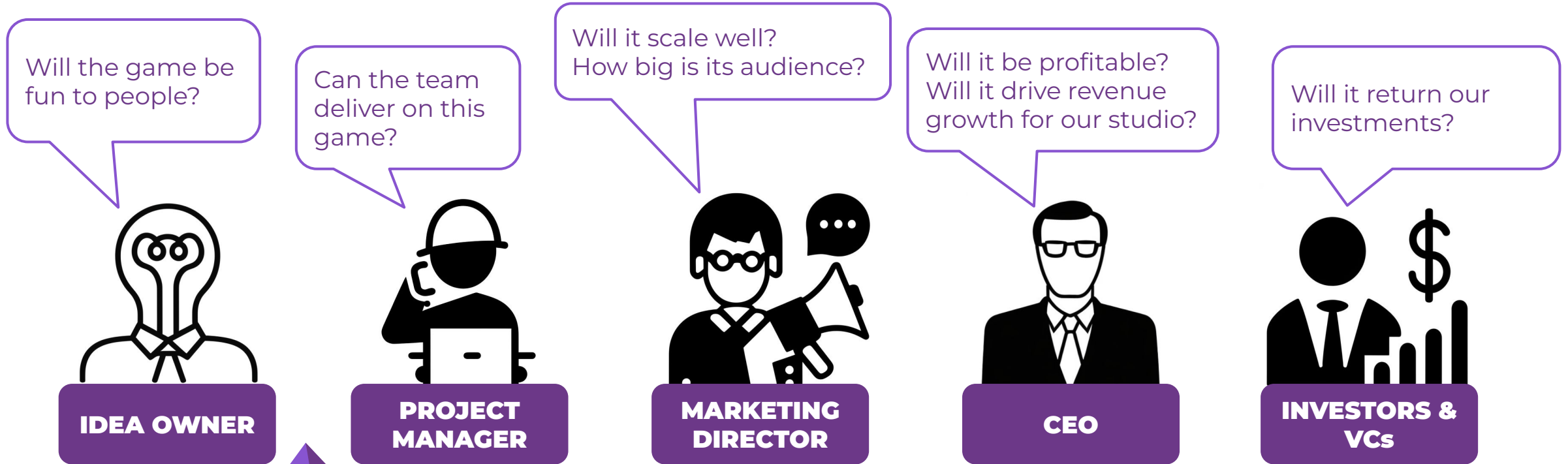 - Managing multi-million dollar budgets on mature and old products
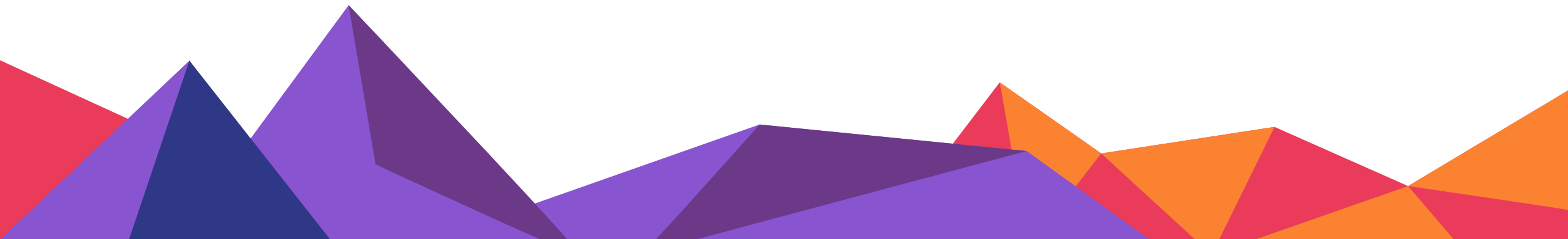
Agenda

Overview: context, key terms and concepts

Walkthrough of sample tests and results
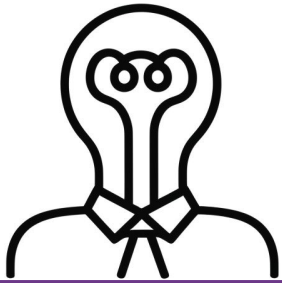
General recommendations and conclusions

The Context

Many stakeholders, many questions

Making the business case

> Does the game idea have the potential to **grow its player base and generate revenue?**

IDEA OWNER

PROJECT MANAGER

MARKETING DIRECTOR

CEO

INVESTORS & VCs

Marketability testing is trending

e concept.. we are a very small team and I'm educating myself with everything possible
mmend any other platoform?

headlines – Dec 7th

Philippe Julien 2:00 AM
I didn't play this specific game but a game that didn't scale doesn't mean it is not of good quality and/or enjoyable.

Scaling is a complex equation of marketability, competition, quality product and monetisation. If any of these factors are off, the game won't scale. But there are plenty of enjoyable games (not stellar, but that have an audience) that couldn't scale.

The s   yet they
find t

Thread # general   ✕

Anette Staloy Feb 17th, 2021 at 7:41 AM
Hi all! On what platforms do you test new potential concepts to put in your game? I ran some Facebook tests a while ago with concepts for a new game (that wasn't launched yet), with link to our website with "Coming Soon" or something like that, but Facebook stopped the campaign as it was a violation on their guidelines. It might have been the wording that was wrong, I dunno. Anyone want to share their experience? I hear all the time (I think @Mishka Katkoff also talked

Matej Lancaric
How to Save Millions With Marketability Testing | Matej Lancaric
Oct 8th, 2021

💥 **2 reactions**

user-acquisition – Feb 24th

William Brinkman 8:14 AM
Are there any blogs, videos, or the like anyone would recommend to better understand scalability testing on audiences and networks as part of a soft launch to help determine marketability and viability?

advice on how to get started.
on Facebook, but younger and prob
ple (would be highly appreciated) -
give valuable feedback. Specifically,
ion that already have 2 map themes
🌵💚

facebook – Jan 4th, 2021

Dante Sanchez 11:10 PM
I'm working on a new game concept.. we are a very small team and I'm educating myself with everything possible regarding testing marketability... has anyone used geeklab.com before? or you guys recommend any other platoform?

I'm really just starting, my plan is to get at least 2 game concepts tested by the end of the month...

Any recommendation will be really appreciated 🙂

💬 **1 reply**

koff 2 years ago
marketability. 12traits for user research

on this topic. Which methods do you use to decide which sub-genres to focus or discard
a new idea?

objective/analytical methods that leave other considerations like Strategy (whether your
s some technology that can be leveraged) and Passion (what the team is passionate about
ise) aside, and focus more on weighting in the decision different factors like market size,
hese KPIs over time, etc.

he past?
preciated, many thanks!!

💬 **11 replies**

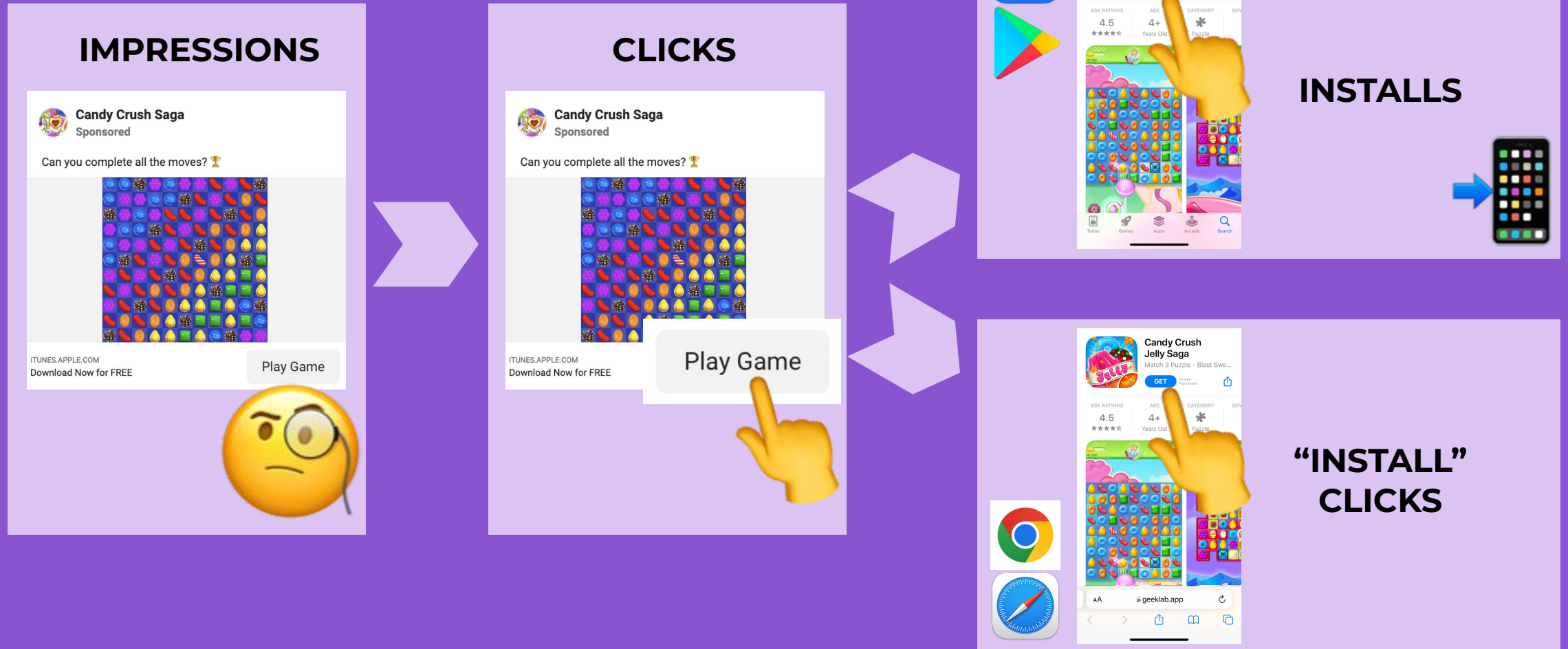# What *is* marketability testing?

Marketability testing - testing performed by running paid ad campaigns to evaluate a certain game idea or a partial idea as early as possible in the product life-cycle, potentially before any product exists

Some metrics used are:

CTR (Click-Through-Rate): Clicks / Impressions

CPI (Cost per Install): Budget Spent / Installs

Marketability testing user flow

IMPRESSIONS

CLICKS

INSTALLS

"INSTALL" CLICKS

Benefits of marketability testing

✔ Gives quantitative data about the new game idea

✔ Doesn't require any game development

✔ Allows to evaluate game idea before investing hundreds of thousands of dollars

✔ Results *appear to be* simple and straightforward

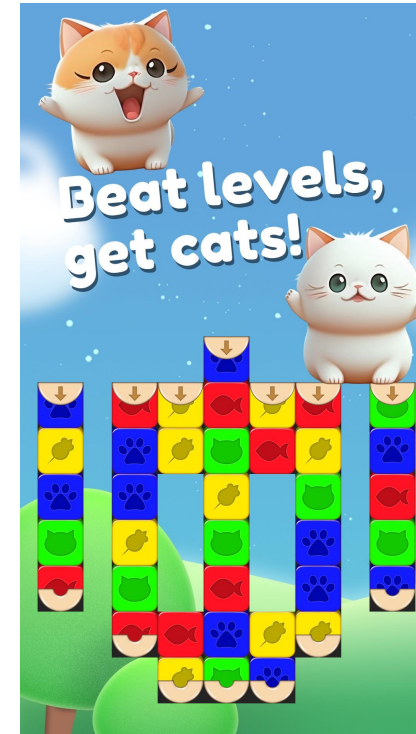# In theory, it sounds like a silver bullet. Is it so in practice?
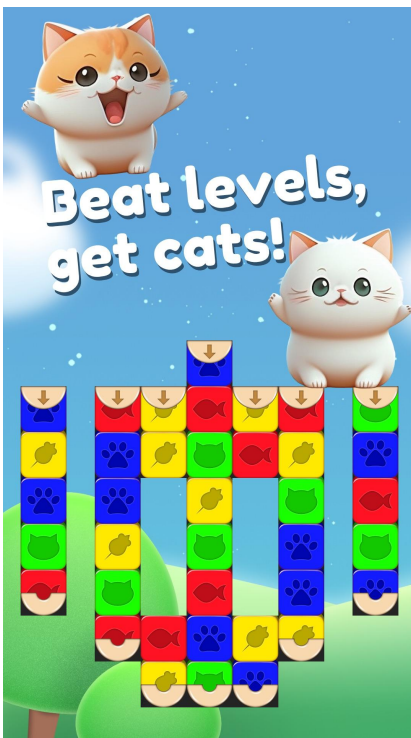
Test #1

Game Idea:
Match-3 game with kittens rescued by playing levels.

Approach:
Run FB ads targeting women 18+ in the US and leading to a fake app store page.

Test #1 - Analyze results

CTR: 3%

CPI: $6

Is $6 CPI high for a cat-themed Match-3 game? Is it low?

Is 3% CTR high or low?

Top grossing Match-3 games have much higher CPIs - is our game going to perform 2-3x better?

Will our game sustain lower CPI at scale?

Does the CTR indicate that our game is going to be more popular than other games?

Will the CTR remain high with a daily budget 100-300x times higher than our test budget?

Test #1 - Learnings

Set clear expectations and define target KPIs for the marketability test ahead of time.

Ideally, test your idea against a control variant. Or test several ideas simultaneously to compare the results among multiple variants.

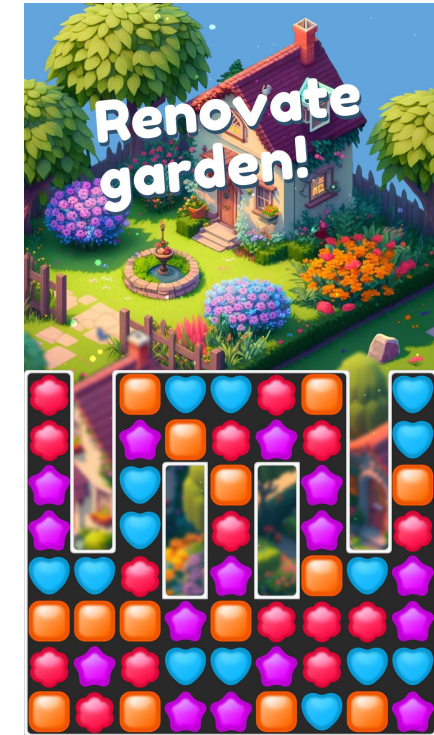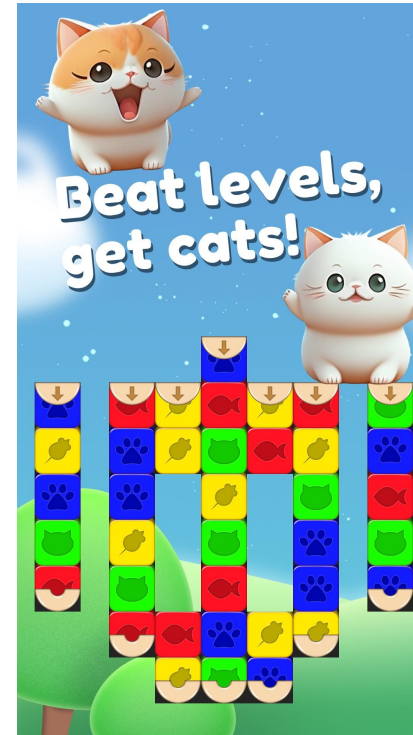# Test #2 - Introduce a control variant

Game Idea:
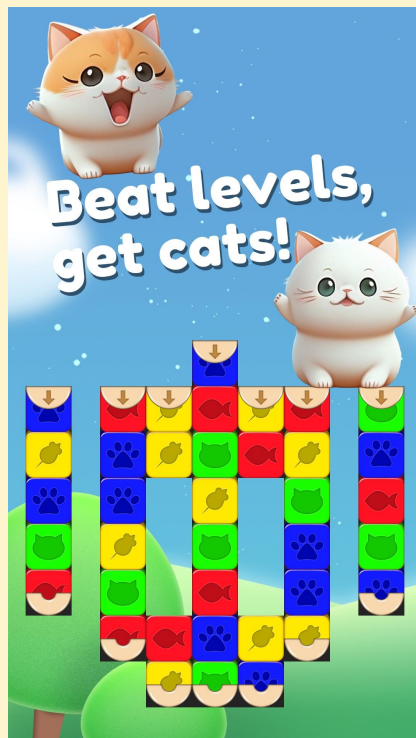Match-3 game with kittens rescued by playing levels.

Control Variant:
Match-3 game with garden & villa renovation between levels.

Approach:
Run FB ads targeting women 18+ in the US leading to a fake web app store page.
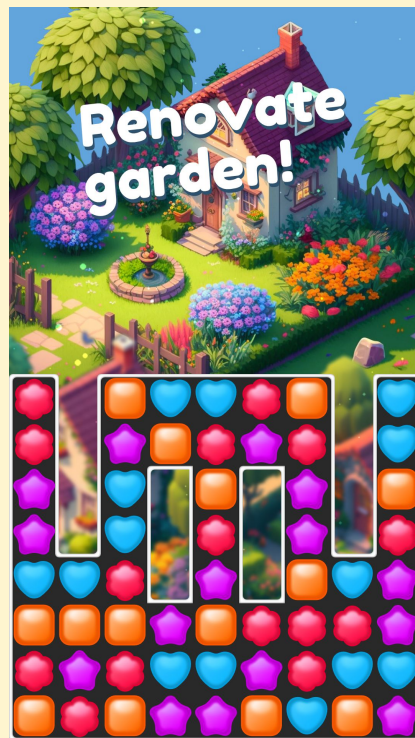
Test #2 - Analyze results

CTR: 2.9%

CPI: $6.6

CTR: 2.8%

CPI: $9

High-level results

Seems like Cats idea performed better - YAY!
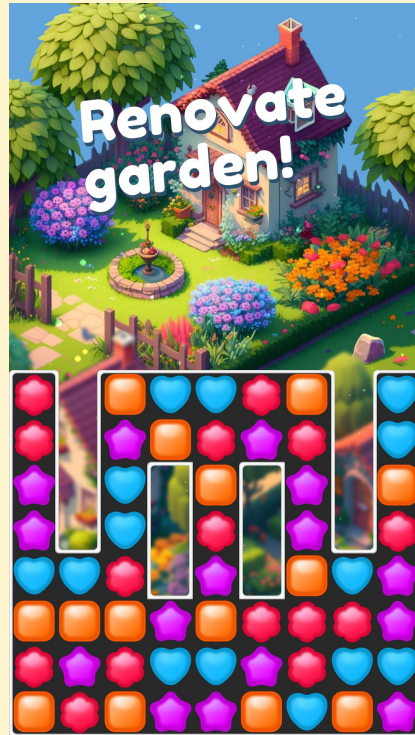
Should we start developing a game?

Test #2 - Analyze results

CTR: 2.4%

CPI: $9.3

CTR: 2.8%

CPI: $9

The results among our core audience, women 45+, are different:

Our Cats idea performed worse: the CPI is higher and the CTR is lower.

We decide not to pursue this idea because it didn't outperform the control.

Test #2 - Learnings

Analyze results beyond high-level KPIs: look at more detailed metrics.

Know your target audience and keep your targeting narrow.

Test #3 - Narrow targeting, new mechanic
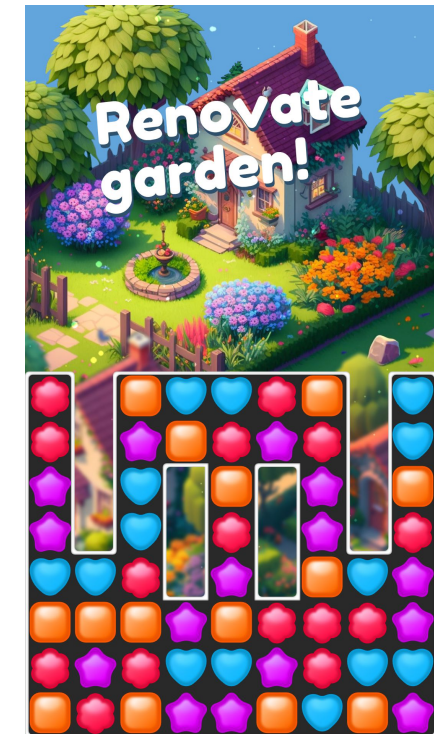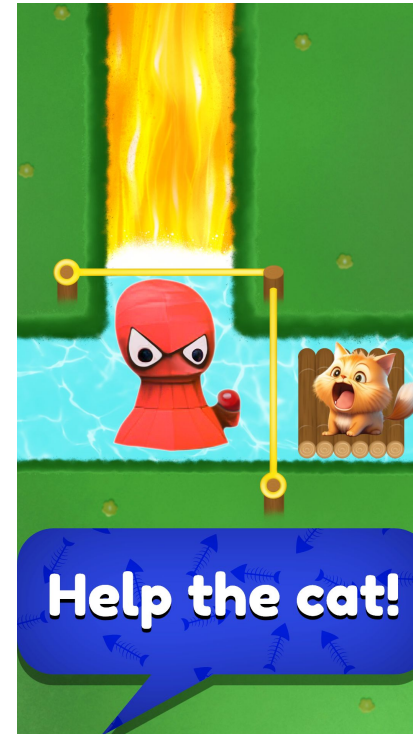
Game Idea:
Rescuing kittens from danger via pull the pin mechanic.

Control Variant:
Match-3 game with garden & villa renovation between levels.

Approach:
Run FB ads targeting women 45+ in the US leading to a fake web app store page.

Test #3 - Analyze results
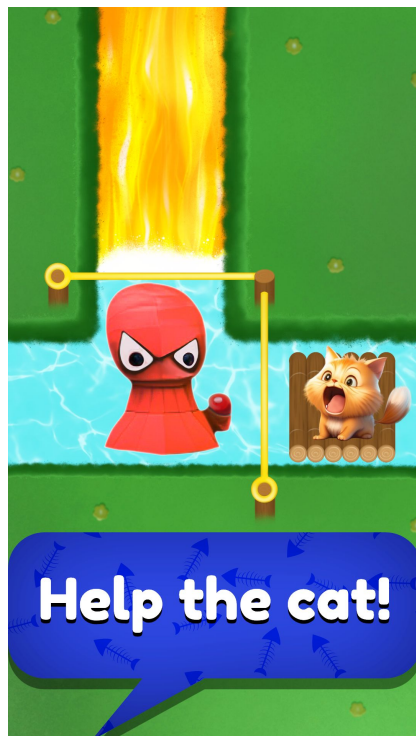
CTR: 9.5%

CPI: $1.5
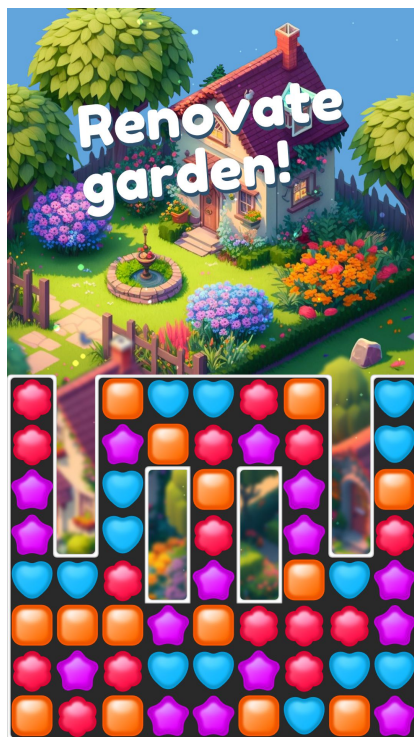
CTR: 2.8%

CPI: $9.2

Pull the pin creative outperformed all other variants with CPI $1.5

Should we make a game with "Pull the pin" core mechanic instead?

However, based on the market examples, similar games are not as successful as CPIs suggest.

Test #3 - Learnings

Ads do not need to accurately represent the game to perform well.

Successful ads do not equate to successful game mechanics.

Don't evaluate game mechanics via marketability tests.

The tip of the iceberg...

There are no one-size-fits-all early marketability tests.

Experiment with various setups & understand how they influence the results.

Look deeper, beyond single high-level metrics like CPI or CTR.

Targeting
- Demographic
- Interests
- Custom audiences

Platforms
- Android - IDFA
- iOS - SKAN

Advertising platform
- Facebook / Instagram
- Ad Networks
- Self-serve platforms

Campaign optimization
- App Installs
- App Events
- Value (ROAS)

Ad format
- Static Images
- Videos
- Carousel

Creative mechanics
- "Fail" ads
- "Save them!" ads
- Pull the pin
- Brain teasers
- ASMR videos
- Ads with choices
- Story-based, mysteries
- etc.

Marketability tests...

Are a good source of quantitative data.

Almost never give answers to the question "Why?"

Should be treated as soft data - can be a source of new hypotheses & ideas, not used for validation of existing ones.

Risks of relying solely on marketability testing:

Risk #1:
Getting false positive results & investing in the development of a game idea that will eventually fail

Risk #2:
Not finding any strong winners and not pursuing any game ideas for years

Recommendations

Don't test variants that are too similar to each other

Little difference between variants will result in low statistical significance

It will make the test very expensive

Think holistically about the brand, theming, art style

Reflect different tones, moods, and the overall look and feel associated with each variant.

Test variants that are significantly different to drive meaningful learnings.

Talk to the users and dig into the *why*

Run a survey to understand the pros and cons of each variant.

Ask open questions.

Examples of questions:

- What do you think game "XYZ" is like?

- Which of game art do you like? Why?

- What do you think the game is about?

- Which game would you play? Why?

- What game names do you remember? (Should be asked at the end of survey.)

Use other tools of market research

Primary research: run surveys, user interviews, and focus groups

Secondary research: published research papers, market reports and industry statistics can give insight into potential market interests and niches

Play tests: observe people playing the game prototype or similar games

Early marketability testing is only one of many tools used for market research

Lowering risk with the right approach

Standardized test setup → Flexible experimental approach

High-level performance analysis → Fine-grained metrics analysis
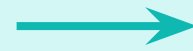
Identify a winner from fixed variants → Identify clear patterns across all tests

Look for definitive answers → Look for new questions & hypotheses

Data-driven → Data-informed

Marketability testing is not a 'checkbox'.

It's an ongoing, iterative process that will help you find the best ads and techniques for successful longer-term marketing and growth of your game.

Thank you!

Diana Maher

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