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Game Developers Conference®  
**March 23-27, 2009** | Moscone Center, San Francisco

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# GAME OUTSOURCING SUMMIT

## Putting it All Together - Building the Right Outsourcing Team

Aaron Pulkka | Director of Production | Activision

# Outsourcing Team

Internal Management  
+  
External Partner

# Key Idea #1

Integrate outsourcing  
team to scale within  
development

# Key Idea #2

Handle outsourcing  
partner selection like  
hiring employees

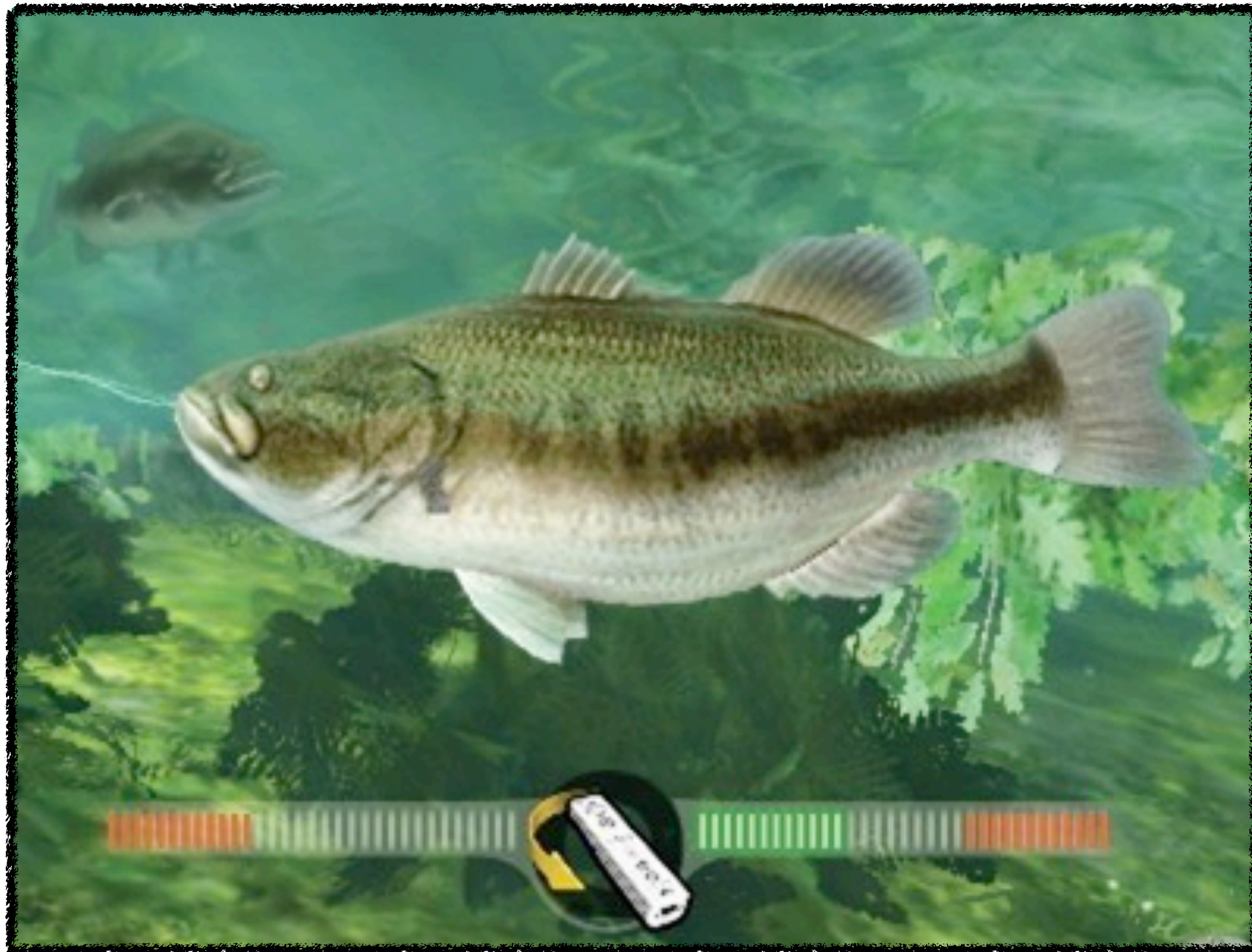


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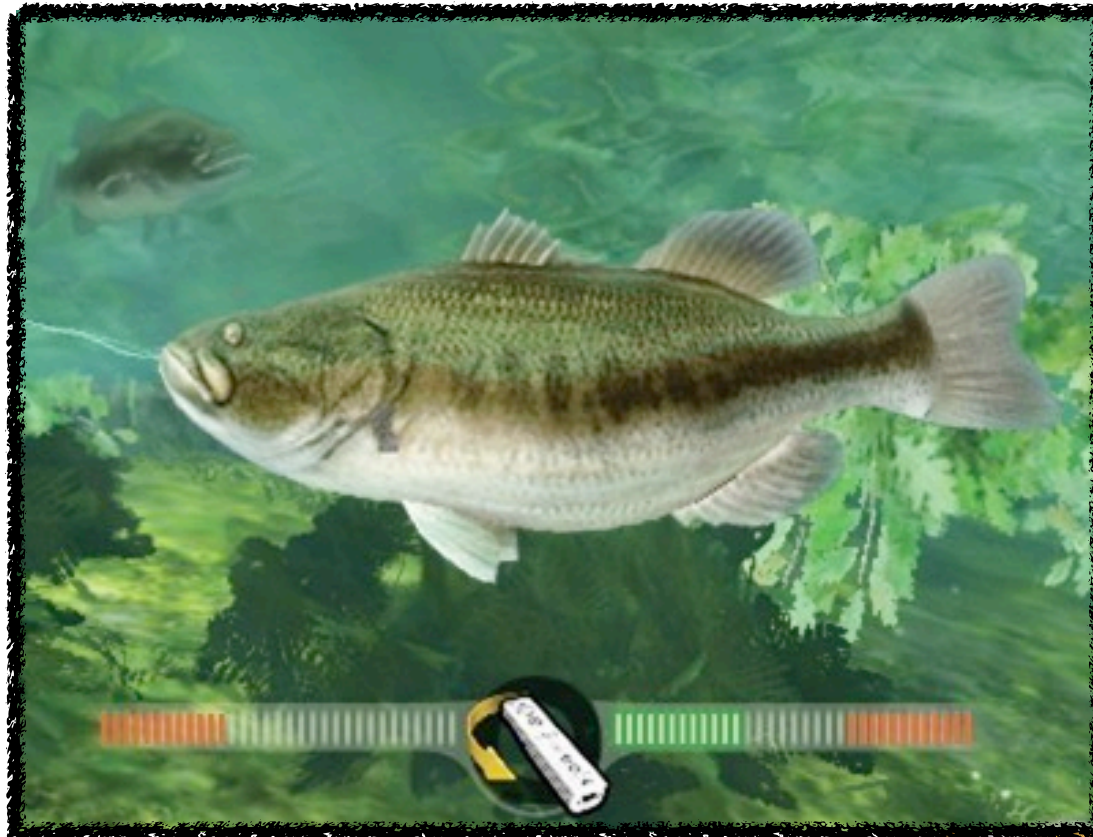
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# Fishing





# Outsourcing and...?



Fishing

Restaurants



# Overview

- Outsourcing Background
- Building Internal Team
- Hiring Partners
- Maturing Teams



# Background

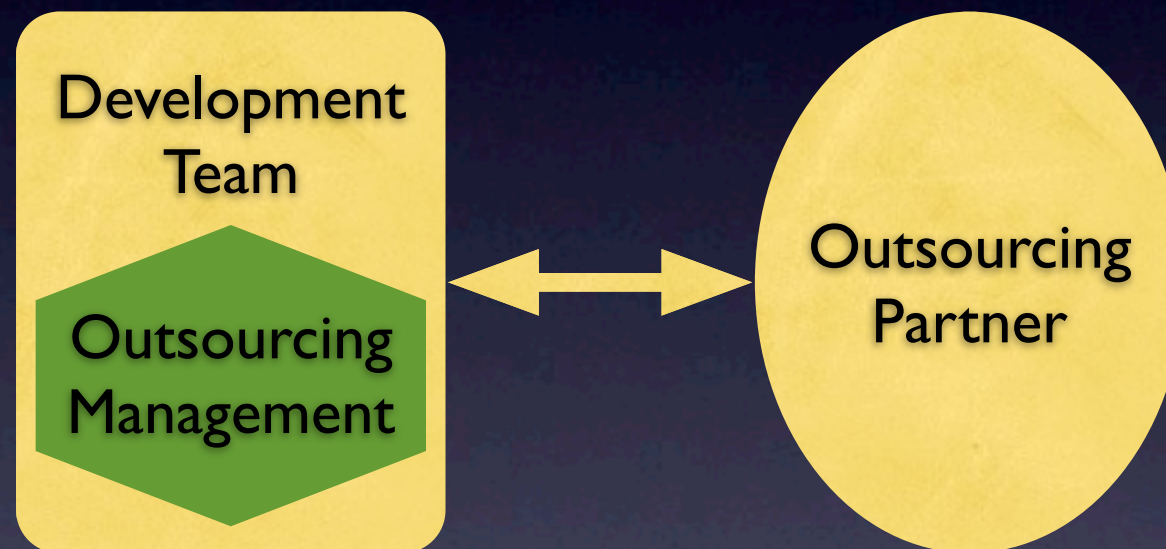
- c1998: Game art outsourcing for Sony Metreon project
- c2003: US-based management firm with Chinese art outsourcing partners
  - Clients included Midway, Activision, EA...
  - *Value Added Bottleneck*
- c2006: THQ XDG
  - Publisher-based outsourcing management

# Value Added Bottleneck





# Avoiding the Bottleneck



# Vivendi Games Outsourcing

- Distributed Development
- Independent Studios
- Small Central Team
  - *Outsourcing Director*
  - *Art Director*
  - *Production Assistant*
- Focused on business development & info share





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# Building the Right Internal Team

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# Outsourcing Team Roles

- ★ Business Development
- ★ Project Management
- ★ Art Direction
- ★ Asset Wrangling
- ★ Quality Control
- ★ Technical Support

# How many new hires?

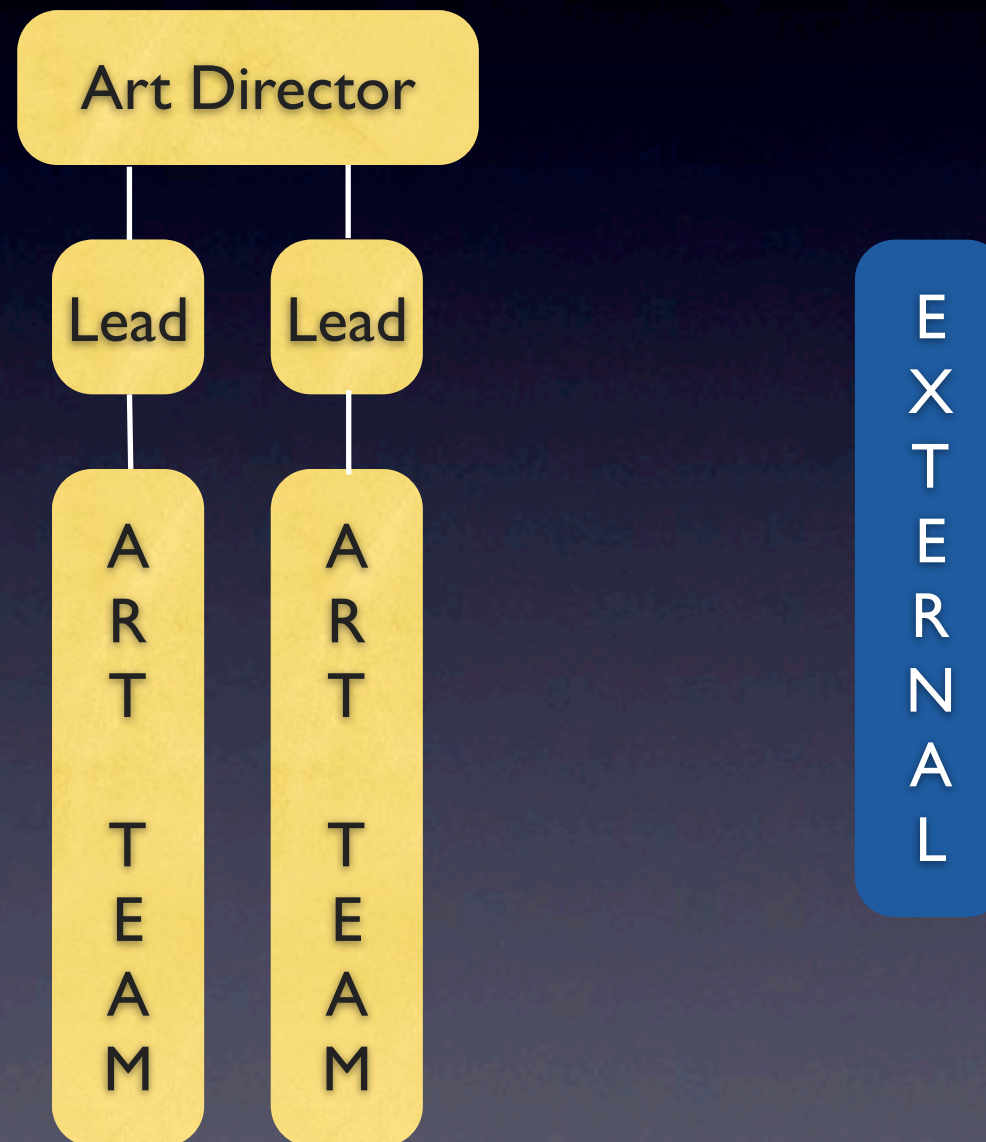
- Team may already exist!
- Roles can be shared
- Necessary team size depends on:
  - *Scope*
  - *Level of granularity*
  - *Relationship maturity*



# Outsourcing Integration

- Build within existing internal structure
- Consider workflow & approval chain
  - *How are assets specified?*
  - *How are assets approved?*
  - *How do assets get into game?*
- How would you scale if ramping up internal staff instead of external?

# Scale as if External is Internal





# Scale as if External is Internal



# Establish clear communication plan

Who can approve assets?

Who will answer questions?

Who receives assets?

Who writes feedback?

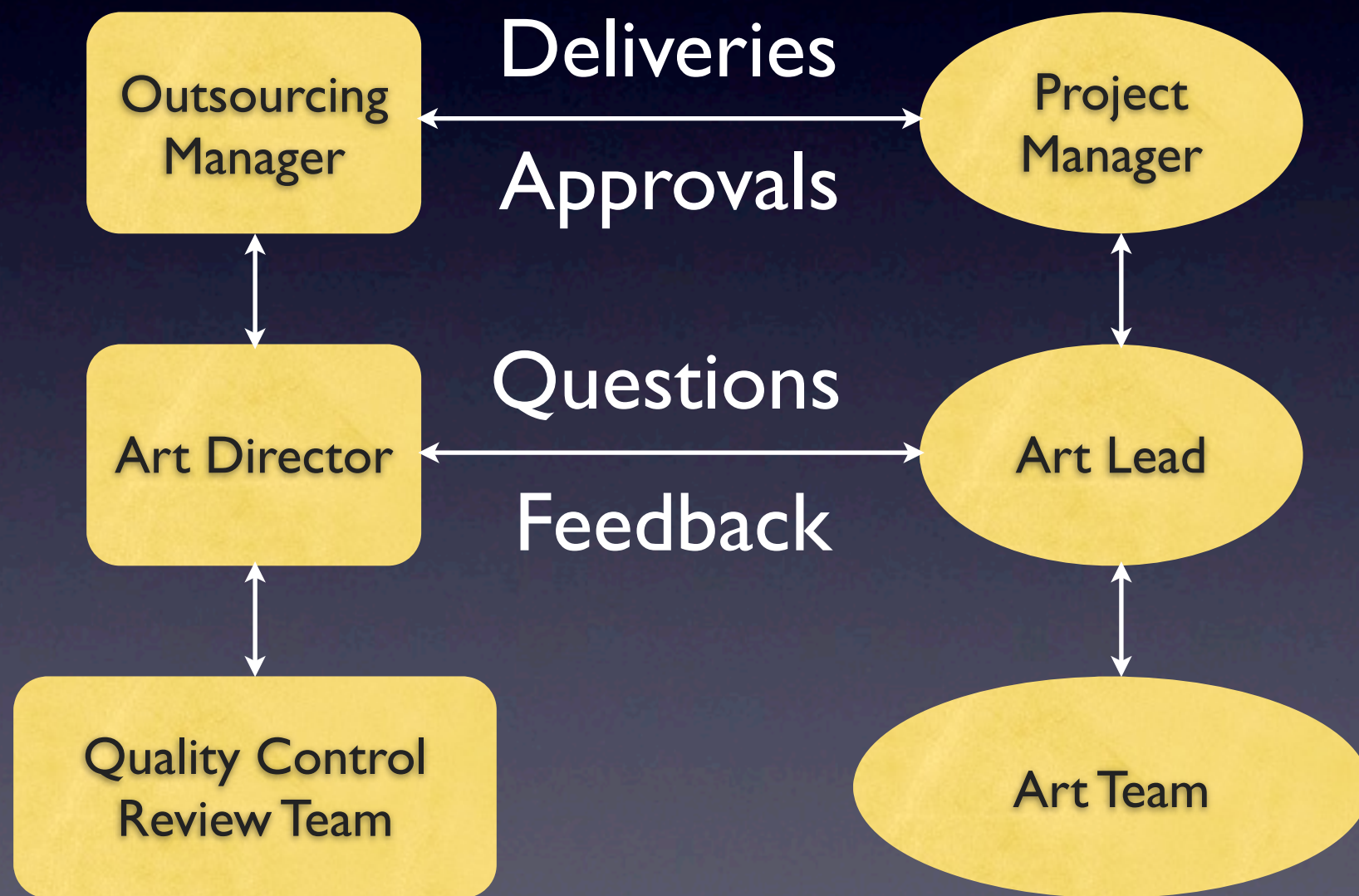
Who sends feedback?

Who can initiate work?

Who are issues escalated to?



# Establish clear communication plan



# Tight Feedback Loop

- Acknowledge every asset drop with feedback time estimate (~24 hrs)
- Staff appropriately to provide feedback within estimated time
- Train QC team to provide clear, concise, grammatically correct feedback



# Experience Matters

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# Building the Right Partnerships

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# Hiring the Right Partners

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# Evaluate Needs

- Skill set
  - Quality / Complexity
  - Budgetary constraints
  - Time constraints
  - Scope estimate
- } Scalability



# Search

- Review past partnerships
- Seek referrals
- Scan resources



# Due Diligence

- |                       |                     |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| ✓ Portfolio / History | ➡ Resume            |
| ✓ Intro Meeting       | ➡ Phone Interview   |
| ✓ Vendor Profile      | ➡ Application       |
| ✓ Site Visit          | ➡ On-site Interview |
| ✓ Independent Audit   | ➡ Reference Check   |



# Types of Due Diligence

- Legal
- Financial
- Operational
  - *Capabilities*
  - *Process*
  - *Security*

# Operational Spotlight

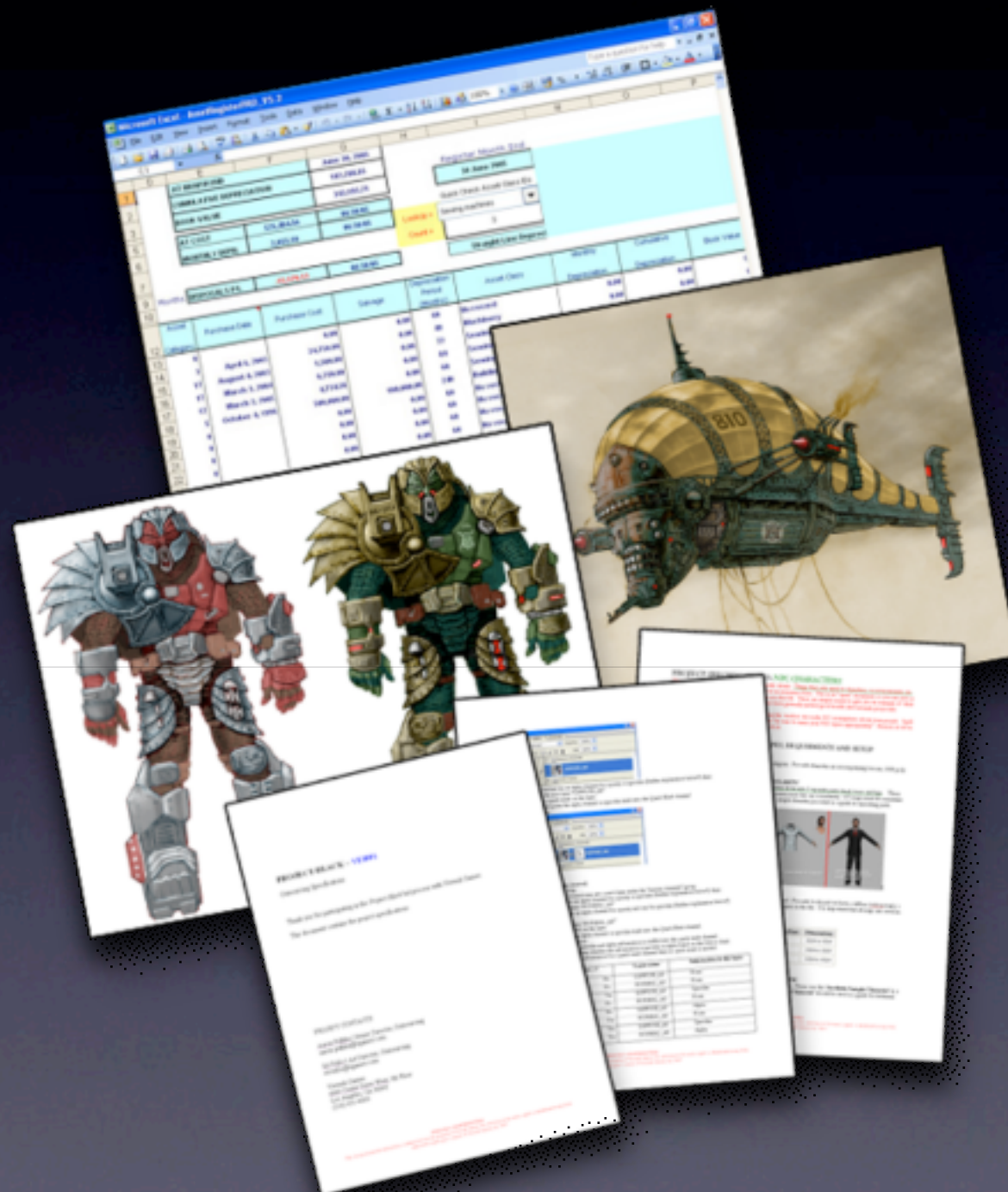
- Expertise
- Size / Scalability
- Reliability
- Communication
- Goals Alignment
- Culture



# Ranking

NAME	Rating	Staff Size	3D ENV	3D CHAR	...	ANIM	Cost \$/MM
Alpha	A	150	X	X	...	X	3,000
Gamma	B	500	X	X	...		8,000
Epsilon	C	90	X		...		1,000

# Competitive Bids



- ▶ Specs
- ▶ Lists
- ▶ Reference
- ▶ *Benchmarks*



- ▶ Staffing plan
- ▶ Delivery schedule
- ▶ Cost proposal
- ▶ *Tests/samples*



# Tests?

Tests must be Real / Relevant

First paid project is the best test  
(start with a small pilot project)

# Evaluating Proposals

- Sanity Check (wildly off?)
- External Cost  $\leq$  Internal Estimate?
- Value = Quality \* Timeliness / Cost
- Results of Due Diligence?



# Accept, Reject, or Negotiate?

Quality

Time Estimates

Rate

# Still Can't Decide?

## Initiate Parallel Pilots



# Secret to Faster Partner Selection?

## Start Earlier

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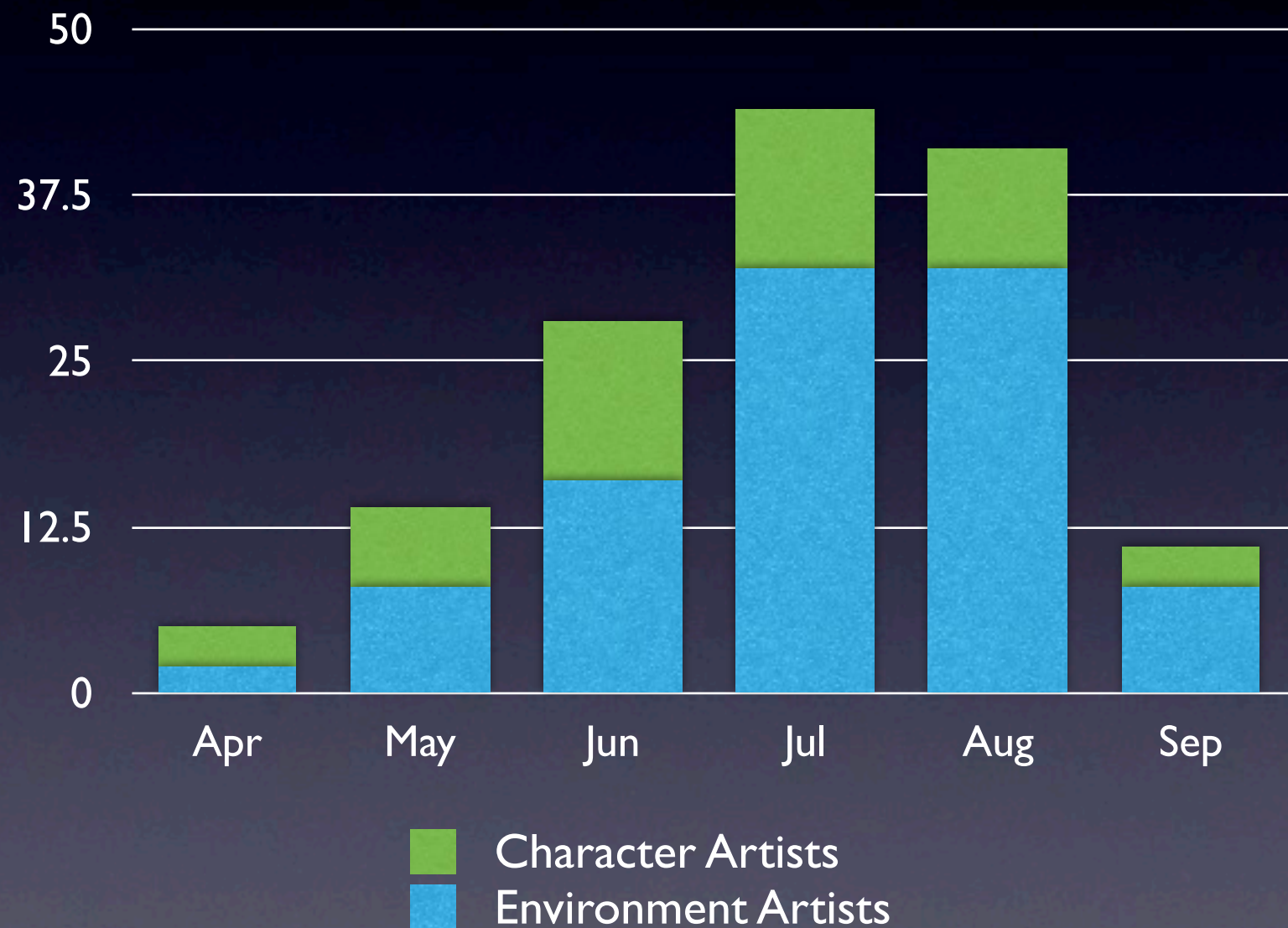
# Beyond Bidding

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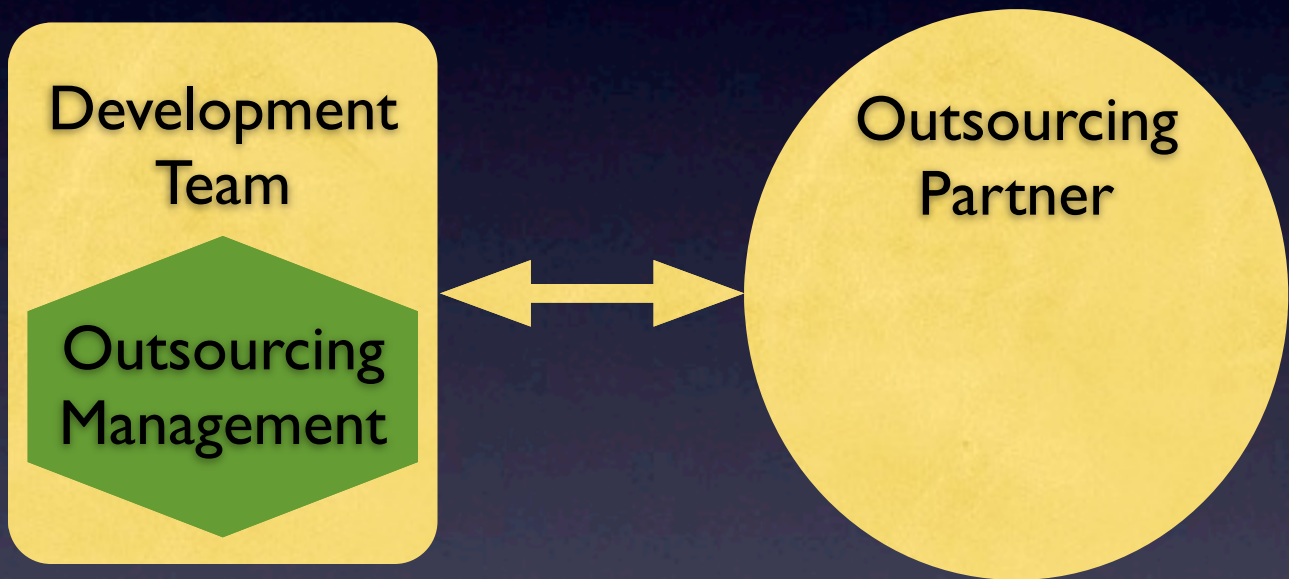
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# Retainer Forecasts

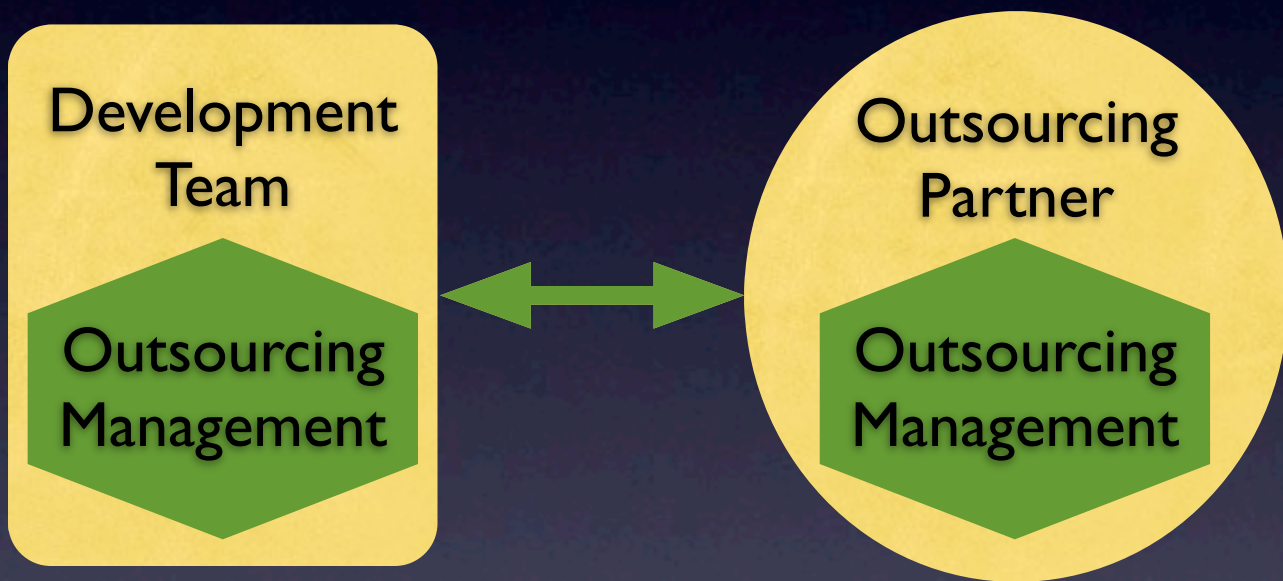


# Co-Development





# Co-Development



# Wrap-up

- ✓ Team = Internal + External
- ✓ Integrate scalable management team
- ✓ Hire partners like employees





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# Q & A