



Letter from the Editor

Welcome to the Winter 2008 issue of the IGDA Casual Games Quarterly.

My name is Michael Thornton Wyman; I am a co-founder and CEO of the casual games studio Big Splash Games. It is my pleasure to be working with James Smith and Alfredo Chaves to bring you this quarterly newsletter moving forward.

I would like to thank editor emeritus Wade Tinney for not only all of his efforts over the past several years putting out this publication, but also for his help with a smooth transition. Wade was instrumental in helping us get this issue together – he edited the Lost Cases of Sherlock Holmes Post Mortem, and also contributed the excellent feature article Social is the New Casual. So, thanks again, Wade!

This is your publication, and we are eager to hear from you. Let us know if you have ideas for stories, topics you would like to see covered or games you would like to read Post Mortems on in the Quarterly. Get in touch if you might be willing to write a piece for this newsletter. Your feedback is always welcome.

Cheers,

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Social is the New Casual Eight Things Casual Game Developers Should Know about Social Games

Wade Tinney, Large Animal Games

In mid-2007, my team got excited about social network games and decided to dive headlong into this nascent space. We've spent the last 12 months transforming from a developer of casual downloadable games into a publisher and developer of social games. The point of this article is to share some of the key things that we learned over the course of that transformation. It is directed at developers and publishers from the casual games world who may be considering a similar transition.

Please note that for the purposes of this article, I use "social games" to refer to games played among groups of friends on social networks like Facebook, MySpace, and Bebo, as well as mobile devices such as the iPhone. I use "casual games" to refer to downloadable games that are primarily distributed through game portals such as RealArcade, Big Fish, and MSN Games.

1) Some of your knowledge and experience will apply.

Not surprisingly, game design fundamentals are no less critical in social games as they are in casual games. Everything that casual game designers know about the psychology of goals and rewards, feedback structures, interactive systems, and even narrative can be brought to bear in the design of social games. The lessons you've learned about teaching novice players how to use a new game system and about appealing to players along a wide spectrum of ability will serve you equally well. And from a competitive perspective, the web 2.0 folks (the talented designers, programmers, and entrepreneurs who created social networks in the first place) are still figuring out the game design component, so you have an advantage on that front for the time being.

2) The platforms are constantly evolving.

Your games will need to tightly integrate with each network's technology platform in order to utilize data from the social graph and facilitate communication between your players and their friends. In other words, you are largely at the mercy of the social networks. Just when you think you've figured out their API and your products are stable, they might change the platform in a dramatic way, like Facebook did in the summer of 2008. In the long run, these changes and continual enhancements are a good thing; just be sure you have a plan for keeping up. And make sure you've got the right mix of skills on your team; this type of web application development is native territory for the web 2.0 folks, so you might want to consider hiring a few of them.

3) Social games require a service mentality.

Despite their digital distribution, casual downloadable games essentially follow a packaged goods model of product development. You spend six months working on a title, send it off to your distribution partners and move on to the next game. In the world of social games, the launch of a game is only the beginning and you'll need to have a plan for supporting and continually improving that game in order to grow and retain an audience. Whereas casual games portals never enabled developers to deliver expansion packs or content upgrades into existing titles, social games fall at the other extreme. Since upgrades to web clients happen automatically for users, and there is no approval process for most platforms, you can release the core of a game quickly and

then add features and new content to keep things fresh and respond to player feedback. At our company, we plan for the same team that developed the game to continue working on it for at least six months after launch.

4) Listen to your players.

This one won't be hard to remember because if you achieve any level of success, it will be impossible to ignore your players; social network gamers can be extraordinarily vocal. You'll also want to watch your players by tracking metrics about how the social features of your game are being used. Listening to players and analyzing usage metrics is especially important for casual game developers, who will find a different mix of players on social networks than they're used to. At this point, the demographic on these sites has begun to resemble the demographic mix of the internet as a whole. Teenagers and college kids are heavy social network users, but they are not alone. According to Comscore, the "35+" demographic makes up 40% of Facebook users and a similar percentage of MySpace users.

For those who aren't in the habit of expending lots of energy maintaining relationships with their customers, this may sound like a pain. The upside is that if you keep your players happy, you will be rewarded with the viral effect that is the lifeblood of social networks. Plus, engaging with players can be a lot of fun. At Large Animal, we love the more direct connection we have to players now, compared to our downloadable game days. Marketing activities are much more satisfying when you can target them and when you know that ultimately, most of your players will find out about your games through their friends.

5) The business models are different.

Currently, advertising and sponsorships are the low-hanging fruit in this space, so if you're not already familiar with acronyms such as CPM, CPI, eCPM, CPA, and CPC, you have some homework to do. There are myriad advertising companies out there who offer some sort of social network solution, so plan on spending some time identifying your needs and then finding one of them who can help you get there.

Micro-payments for virtual goods are working in social networks. Analysts estimate that Facebook sold \$20-40 million worth of virtual gifts last year, demonstrating that their users see the value in digital goods that enhance the social experience. While they are still not 100% understood within social network games, the early results are very promising. Micro-payments offer a more "casual", lower-commitment form of payment than the \$19.95 price-point that has marked the casual game space. Players have greater control over what they'll spend and are not forced to make a larger spending decision at an arbitrary 60-minute gateway. Keep in mind, however, that selling virtual goods is both art and science and something you'll need to design into your products from the very beginning. Pay close attention to what the Korean game developers and publishers do in their games (such as MapleStory and KartRider); they have been at the forefront of the free-to-play/virtual item business model for nearly a decade.

6) Your game is not the main attraction.

Most people who use social networks do so in order to stay connected to their friends. They are not sitting down to spend large blocks of time with your game, as they might with a console game or a downloadable game. Social games don't typically take over their whole screen and demand all their attention; they are bite-sized pieces of content that exist alongside and enhance existing communication. You can think of this existing communication as a kind of built-in meta-game. It is a rich context that your game will live within and add to. This type of context is almost non-existent in the casual downloadable games, where people come to the online store, buy something,

and then go play it alone. The challenge for social game developers is to weave their games into this context as deeply as possible.

Like a pool table or a dartboard in a bar, social network games can give friends (and often strangers) a reason to connect, and something to talk about. And the asynchronous multiplayer games that are so popular on social networks—turn-based challenges that can take place over the course of days—have the effect of bending time and space. They enable busy friends to share a game experience together without having to coordinate their schedules. In other words, games have a utility within the social network, acting as a connection point and social lubricant.

7) Social games require focus and commitment.

If you've made it this far, this point should be obvious. Don't expect to just drop the flash version of your game into Facebook and expect players to flock to it. The most successful games were designed, or at least re-designed, to integrate with the social graph. They draw information from a player's circle of friends and build that information into the game. Doing this effectively requires lots of experimentation, a deep understanding of the social network and its touchpoints (such as newsfeeds, notifications, profile blocks, invitations, et cetera), and careful on-going analysis of all the metrics associated with your games. If your company can't afford to take this time and focus on social games, you should either keep your expectations low or partner with someone who is focused on it.

On a more practical level, make sure everyone in your company actually uses social networks and more importantly, sees the value in them. If the team isn't fully on-board with the phenomenon, they won't be thinking creatively about how to develop great products for it.

8) But don't focus TOO much.

Part of a full commitment to this space is taking a broad view of social networks. Facebook is not the only game in town. The social networking world moves quickly and

next year might just bring us a completely new dominant social network. In the meantime, there are over a dozen social networks that have 1,000,000+ registered users and they are all potential channels for your games. New devices such as the iPhone should also be carefully considered as a natural extension to web-based social networks. With all this in mind, my company decided to take a network-neutral approach to social games; we invested up front in developing a framework that would support a more transportable set of features and enable our players to connect across multiple networks.

Conclusion

After working almost exclusively within the casual downloadable market for over five years, our company has found new energy and exciting challenges within social network games. In many ways, the problems and opportunities in this space remind us of the download market back in 2001-2002, when everyone was still actively experimenting, trying to figure out who the consumers were and which themes, game mechanics, and business models would resonate with them. Social games are still in their infancy and we believe they have enormous potential.

Author Bio

Wade Tinney is co-founder and CEO of independent publisher and developer Large Animal Games. The company was founded in 2001 and is headquartered in New York City. Large Animal has developed over 75 games, including critically acclaimed downloadable titles such as Rocketbowl, Snapshot Adventures: Secret of Bird Island, and Saints & Sinners Bowling. Large Animal has focused on social games since mid-2007, developing original games and helping other developers and publishers bring their IP to social networks. Their PlayWidgets platform supports the creation of player-customizable game widgets and their recently released Toga platform enables developers to integrate their games across multiple social networks and with devices such as the iPhone. Large Animal's social network games include: Bumper Stars, Lucky Strike Lanes, and Bananagrams. Try them out at: <http://www.bumperstars.com>

The Lost Cases of Sherlock Holmes Post Mortem

Jonathan Cooper, Legacy Interactive

Introduction

In early 2006, Legacy Interactive embarked on a new project: a casual game based on the stories of Sherlock Holmes. Legacy was no stranger to the adventure game genre having developed multiple titles based on the Law & Order TV license. But *The Lost Cases of Sherlock Holmes* was different because it was specifically designed to be a casual hidden object game. With full licensed support from the estate of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and being on the verge of a new and upcoming genre of games, everything seemed to be on track. Then we hit a wall. The original publisher pulled out of production and the game had to be shelved. As further funding was explored, the hidden object genre continued to increase in popularity. Nearly a year later, favor turned our way and Sherlock was back in the picture.

That's about the time that I was brought on to the project. I was somewhat new to the casual side of video games, but had a strong story-telling background in games and was an avid fan of the works of Sir Conan Doyle. Armed with that, a solid concept design by our Executive Producer, Dr. Craig Brannon, and even a working prototype, I embarked into new territory.

What Went Right

1. *Staying True to the License*

It seemed incredibly important from the start that the game needed to be true to its license. After all, we are talking about Sherlock Holmes; one of the most popular fictional characters of all time. Aside from the millions of rabid "Sherlockians" that would probably string us up if we mistreated the characters, being the first video game officially licensed by the Conan Doyle Estate, Craig and I knew we had to keep a certain standard of writing when attempting this.

We also knew that the story would be a

key element in the game. By the time I got involved in the project, the hidden object genre was fully exploding, but from my standpoint, most of these games lacked a certain quality and depth of storytelling. One thing was sure, in order to pull this off without diverging too far from the original material, it had to be a period piece. This would prove to be a real challenge but one we thought would help set the game apart from the bevy of other hidden object games coming out on a weekly basis.

We turned to writer Mark Bourne, who had previous experience penning short stories in the style of the original Doyle works. He turned out a wealth of small cases that incorporated all the gameplay styles we had designed and covered a great variety of crimes, mysteries, and locations all in a spot-on Doyle-esque manner. I have to admit, at first when I read the stories I was picking them apart as any snobby Sherlockian would, but a healthy dose of workload quickly cured me of that and I'm glad it did because once they were implemented in the game, they worked out very well.

2. *Multiple Bite-sized Cases*

If you are not familiar with the original stories of Sherlock Holmes, the entire cannon consists of 4 novelettes and 56 short stories. Since the originals favored the short story format it seemed natural to follow in this approach. As I mentioned, Mark turned out some nice plots and dialog and we were quickly on our way to having 16 self-contained stories.

We were at times concerned about his format for several reasons: Firstly, was the story of the cases too invasive? Did it take away from the gameplay? And secondly, did this format tie the game together enough? Craig and I quickly agreed that the story definitely added to the experience and so we were not

too concerned about the first issue, but the second issue weighed heavy in my mind. Since casual games typically offer a trial period of one hour, I was concerned that players would feel satisfied after playing two or three cases but not be drawn in enough to purchase the rest of the game. In the end I had to believe in my faith that the power of the story and gameplay would prevail.

The unexpected part was that having multiple relatively short cases became a favorite feature of many of the players. In hindsight it seems to make a lot of sense that casual gamers, who tend to play in shorter durations, would enjoy a game that they could play for 20 or so minutes and still feel like they have experienced a complete story without having to worry about remembering where they left off last time they played or how long they need to play in order to reach a natural break in the game.

3. *Dare to be Different*

One thing Craig and I agreed on from early on was that there were fundamental aspects that seemed ubiquitous within most every hidden object game that we did not like and would not fit well into the immersive story element of our game. One of the main objections we had with current games is that many hidden objects were included in scenes for camouflage sake and nothing more. This is what we came to call the "green pretzel in the tree" phenomenon.

We felt that Sherlock's unique powers of observation and deduction, as well as the setting in turn-of-the-century England would not lend the game to having anachronistic items placed in completely unnatural places or camouflaged in the wallpaper. We were determined to have the items players would be finding in our game to have some realistic bearing on the story. Why would Holmes, when investigating a murder, be

concerned about a penguin in the middle of a garden? More so, what would a penguin be doing in the middle of a garden in Victorian London anyway? The result was one of our first mantras: If Sherlock wouldn't pay attention to it; it doesn't belong in the game. If it doesn't look like it could naturally exist in the scene, it shouldn't be there.

Although not without its difficulties in maintaining this ideal (as you will read more about later), I do feel it added a certain amount of realism to the game. Players felt more like they had a purpose and where actually actively working toward solving the mystery. It helped maintain a connection between the player and the story. I am very glad we adhered to this as much as we could.

Keeping the story coherent and the settings real and accurate meant finding a way to deal with suspects that were implicated by the story and the hidden clues throughout the game. Adhering to our mantra #1, now almost every hidden object in the game implicated a possible suspect so we had to deal with narrowing the suspects down to the final culprit. Our aim was to find a way that allowed the players to do this in an entertaining mini-game that let them feel like they were helping with the solving of the crime, but in a way that is not too tedious. A large number of the games we were reviewing would rely on one ending-level mini-game that would be repeated each time such as a picture jigsaw. We needed something that would be more varied and unique each time but without requiring the player to re-learn a new gameplay mechanic each time. Fortunately, Craig already had this answer.

I have never met anyone before who so thoroughly enjoys creating, playing, and solving puzzles the way Craig does. He had been working on a visual based, category sorting, Sudoku-like puzzle since before I started working at the company and had tried to use the mini-game in several projects before but it never seemed to fit perfectly and so had been left in the wind each time. Call it fate or luck, but the gameplay fit perfectly for our Sherlock game. It allowed us to incorporate all the suspects and make the categories dynamic so the mini-game could vary without losing the core gameplay. Of course this meant more work in the design



Craig's picture Sudoku is finally realized.

process but the end result is more fun for the player.

4. Listening to Beta Testers

Game testers are the closest connection a video game company has to the end users and are the foundation of all video game production. I encourage all producers, designers, artists, and everyone else involved in a game's production to listen to tester feedback carefully and with a very open mind. That said, we were presented with the opportunity to have a fairly large-scale public beta test of the game. Hundreds of real users played the game and told us what they thought of the game. As expected, we received plenty of no-so-helpful comments such as "make it better" but we did receive a lot of feedback and data that really aided us in pinpointing some areas that players had problems and disliked as well as features that they wanted implemented.

Some of the feedback contained suggestions that completely caught us off guard. If you are making a puzzle-based casual game I can give you this advice with full confidence based on our beta testers: Avoid the slider puzzles! I do believe one of the beta testers started boycotting all Legacy games

simply because of our slider puzzle in the second case. Needless to say, the slider puzzle was changed to a different type and the trends we found within the beta test feedback allowed us to make some adjustments that were mostly minor but added a wealth of gameplay customization and balance to the game. Feedback from "fresh eyes" is incredibly valuable because a novice's experience can often be hard to predict as a developer when you are so intimately familiar with your game.

An example of a feature that was implemented as a direct result of player feedback is the dialog pop-up option. In the original Beta build of the game, when a player found all the objects that implicated a suspect, a pop-up window with dialog would appear where one of the characters would give the player a little more background information or motive about that suspect. What we didn't know was that a decent number of hidden object gamers do not like to be disturbed when they are on the hunt. Taking this to heart, we were able to implement an option to allow players to disable the dialog from popping up during the scene but still gave them access to the dialog that they could view at their leisure. Our programmers had implemented this option in a very



The user interface went through several upgrades until the final. As you see here the bad placeholder dialog got revamped as well.



Text and time was made more discernable and room for the suspects was created.

short time and we were able to appease the players who wanted to hunt objects undisturbed as well as those who wanted to experience the story in real time as the script was written. I could not have predicted this without the feedback from the beta testers.

5. Time to Re-up

As the development of our game progressed, we witnessed the hidden object genre swell at an unbelievable rate. At first we were distraught by this because often times, game genres can be fads whose popularity wanes. Fortunately for us, the demand for this genre continued to be strong. Many players seemed to be starving for more hidden object games, but the expectations of players had also risen as well.

With so many hidden object games on the market, we were able to play them and read reviews allowing us to see what was working and what wasn't in the genre. It also became clearer that we needed to re-up the quality of our game. We were able to take the time to improve the interface, menus, tutorial, hints, and much more with full confidence of what would likely work well. Although this may have been as much a necessity considering the increase in competition, the players reap the benefits in the form of improved game experience.

What Went Wrong

1. Underestimating Art Requirements

Art was by far the most difficult aspect to wrangle during the game's development. This was the first hidden object game we had developed, so we were not familiar with the sheer volume of assets that would be required. The assets would also be very dependent on the development progress. We couldn't start working on generating things like the environments, objects and characters until the writing of the cases was complete. Before that we couldn't predict where any of the scenes would take place, what evidence would be required or even what characters should look like until that part of the story and gameplay was fully designed. In developing most of our other games, we can usually start planning and working on art ahead of these things as long as we have a general sense of where they story takes place and who the characters will be. The gameplay usually is a bit separated from the story and characters are less integral to the gameplay. In this case, the settings and characters were the gameplay. Therefore everything had to be designed carefully before any art could be created.

We did know there would be more assets involved than was typical of most other games we had developed at Legacy. Then we realized that the asset creation would be even

more complicated. Since the objects that the player was finding were all clues and pertinent to the story, the items the player had to search for needed to be set. Typically in games of this type the scenes are loaded with objects and the list of what should be found is randomly selected from the items in the scene. We did not have this luxury (since we were adamant about adhering to mantra #1). That would mean that the list of items had to be the same each time a case is played. We felt strongly that we didn't want to have limited replayability, so we defined multiple possible positions for the objects that needed to be found.

Although we increased the replayability, we had also tripled the amount of objects that needed to be hidden and outputted as individual graphic files. On top of that, we had over 40 unique mini-puzzles already in the works and the nature of the short story cases did not allow us to revisit locations as was typical of this genre (which would have helped to minimize the sheer quantity of assets). The result was the desired effect of variety, scope, randomization and replayability and is something that hadn't really been done before in these kinds of games. However, it was quite an undertaking, to say the least. Our production artist, Lindsay Mathers, and I were still tweaking these assets to the bitter possible end of production. For a time around the office we were calling the game *The Lost Assets of Sherlock Holmes!*

2. Good Animation is Hard

It used to be standard that cut scenes in casual games were simply a series of comic book panels. Within the last year or so, there have been more casual games that contained cut scenes with animation. Since we thought animated scenes would be more engaging, we asked our programming team to allow us to add Flash animated cut scenes into the game. We felt like this would be a good way to take advantage of a variety of animation capabilities available in Flash while also allowing us to still keep the file sizes within a reasonable range. Upon embarking this phase of the production, we quickly realized it would take quite a bit of work to pull this off and about triple the development time we had anticipated. We ultimately utilized the artistic production power of three different art studios as well as our own internal artists to complete the 65 cut scenes in a timely manner.



Animations can get a little silly at times.

We did manage to get all the artists on the same page so the style of the components from different studios matched fairly well. However, we later realized that the methods we used to set up and create the files were slightly different than the art studios which resulted in some undesired results. On some systems it would be more obvious to see which “pieces” were moving in the animated scenes. Other times the animations would fall slightly out of sync which, unfortunately to unknowing viewers, looks like there was no real syncing at all. We were also hampered by the time and budget constraints so the animation (especially the lip

syncing) was not as polished as we were originally aspiring to achieve.

I am glad we decided to include animated cut scenes as I think despite the difficulties, we still accomplished a level of increased personality for the characters even if it didn't turn out exactly as we hoped. In our minds, it proves that without unlimited space (file size space that is) and with a limited time and budget (to hire Digital Domain or Pixar, for example), good animation is hard.

3. Feature Creep

The aforementioned benefit of listening to beta testers also came with its difficulties. The result was the dreaded feature creep. We had powerful data and feedback from play-testers and the means to utilize it to balance and hone the game into something much more accessible to a wide audience. Unfortunately this came to us in the last few weeks of the development and the time for implementing feature changes and requests was scary. Aside from the distinct possibility of giving our programmers a heart attack when they hear about implementing an entirely new feature into the game during the final week the game is due, it limits the amount of testing we can perform to ensure a new feature functions properly; not to mention the wealth of new bugs a new feature could create unknowingly.

Through some deft programming and a lot of long nights for me, we were able to include some good new features and changes into the game without too many protests from our programmers. One of the last features to be implemented was the ability for players to skip puzzles if they desired. To me the sheer volume of feedback we received about specific features in the game would have been a mistake to ignore. We tried to find simple solutions as much as we could, but in the end, we opted for as much customiza-



Adding the skip feature and changing the dreaded slider puzzle were some of the late changes that were scary but worthwhile.

tion for the player as possible. The moral of this is? Listen to your beta testers, but for the sake of your programmers, do it as early as possible.

4. Localization Difficulties

Early in the game's production I definitely had my wits about me when it came to localization, always striving to make sure text remained in text files whenever possible and not relying on text in graphics because this is where most of the localization problems occur in terms of production time. This game, however, brought in a whole wealth of new and interesting issues that I had never seen before. I had localized games with immense stories (several with over 200 hours of gameplay) but most of them were based in a much more fantastic setting which make them much more open to interpretation when translating. Sherlock Holmes was using puns and proverbs and word puzzles that were simpler in terms of mechanics but proved to be much more difficult to translate well, especially since many of them were tied so closely to the story.

With the design becoming increasingly more involved I soon began to throw localization caution to the wind and concentrated on the best design experience for the player for this first version. Localization was always looming as a concern but I think perhaps I was secretly hoping we wouldn't have to deal with it. I was wrong. With the

success of the game I am now looking at perhaps 10 different languages to localize. Many of them have their own issues that force us to handle them on an extremely individual basis. For example, one case relies heavily on the proverb “where there is a will, there is a way.” Needless to say, this proverb doesn’t exist in other languages. Even though the proverb can be translated, the phrase was tied to many puns and “double meanings” which just don’t translate at all. Another good example is a puzzle in

Conclusion

The most important thing to take from this experience, I feel, is to trust your instincts. The game industry is still very young and can benefit the most from companies and people who are willing to take risks and experiment. I have never had such an easy and enjoyable time working on a game as I have with the team at Legacy. Easy, not in the sense of less work to do (certainly not the case), but in the fact that even at the 12th

Data Points

Little Known Facts:

The magnification effect of the magnifying glass cursor as an option was not a feature that was added later to enhance the gameplay contrary to many theories I have read in forums and such. It was actually the natural and only state of the cursor for most of the development of the game. The small traditional pointer was added later in response to many of our staff members, beta testers and business partners expressing the desire to be able to have an unobstructed view of the whole scene.

Author Bio

Jonathan Cooperson graduated from New York University with a degree in Film and Television production. After working in the film industry as a gaffer and cinematographer for many years, he discovered the world of video game production and was instantly intrigued. He has been working in video games since 2000 and has worked for Crave Entertainment and Square Enix Inc. He came to Legacy to realize his love for designing and producing video games but still maintains his independent filmmaker’s spirit on the side. Jonathan has an amazing wife, no kids, and a terminally ill cat that has outlived many other healthy cats.

About Legacy Interactive

Legacy Interactive (www.legacyinteractive.com) is a leading developer and publisher of casual games for people of all ages. Entertaining customers since 1998, the company has built a reputation for developing intelligent, realistic and engaging games for a broad audience. Located in Los Angeles, Legacy is known for its TV-branded games, such as Law & Order and The Apprentice, as well as for its popular simulation games Pet Pals: Animal Doctor, Emergency Room and Zoo Vet. Through Legacy’s online casual game portal at www.legacygames.com, customers can download and try more than 500 casual games plus read and write reviews and share play lists of their favorite games. Legacy has ongoing distribution, marketing and content strategic partnerships with a number of companies, including Vivendi Games, Universal Studios, Ubisoft, Mindscape, Majesco Entertainment, and Scholastic.



How do you localize a puzzle that only uses the first 7 letters of the English alphabet?

which the names of the clues you find tie into a scrambled message which leads to the culprit. This will be especially challenging as each language will have unique words for the objects which means changing all the clues to fit the message or simply leaving it in English and losing the audience.

Of course the demand for localized versions is a great thing. Certainly it is a tell tale sign that our game is well received and for that, I am ecstatic. Although I am still deeply immersed in solving these localization issues, I am a firm believer that game design and player experience should always come first. Unfortunately storytelling media will always suffer from some loss in translation, but we should be aware of the ever-expanding international markets.

hour of the day I still found myself going strong because I loved the project that much.

When you are true to your instincts and can strive to adhere to them it shows in your work. My pride and conviction for Sherlock drove me to put in the time and effort to make it what I knew it could be. The dedication and effort made by my teammates inspired me more and I believe that my efforts in turn fueled them; ultimately leading to a quality that otherwise might not have been possible. I thank Legacy for giving me the opportunity to work on this and the freedom to make it my own in many ways but most of all I thank the people who made the game a success. Hopefully we have inspired future casual games to take some chances, strive to be different, and push the limits.

Top 10 Data Review for Q1-Q3 of 2008

James C. Smith, GameSalesCharts.com

The casual games quarterly newsletter has gotten behind schedule so in this installment we are looking at data from the first three quarters of 2008 (January through September). As always, we estimate which games are the best sellers on each portal by counting the number of times the games appear in the top 10 list published on each portals web site. Based on the games number of appearances in the top 10, and the ranking of each appearance, a score is assigned to game. The top 10 list archives on CasualCharts.com are used to tabulate all the data.

As we have seen for the last 24 months or so, the top 10 lists on most portals are dominated by hidden object games followed closely by time management games. Sims, adventures, and match 3 games also continue to be popular. So far we are not seeing a new style of game catch on fire and replace hidden object games the way hidden object games replaced the previously hot chain popper category. It seems like there is no end to the number of themes and back stories you can put into a hidden object games, time management games and sim. This reskinning didn't work as well with all the chain poppers and match 3 clones of 2005 but for these new game types it seem endless.

There are a couple popular games worth mentioning that don't rely heavily on the most popular play mechanics. Jojo's fis-

Estimated Top 5 Selling Games of Q1-Q3 of 2008

Rank	Big Fish Games	MSN Top Games	Real Arcade	Reflexive Arcade	Shockwave	Yahoo!
1	MCF: Madame Fate	Dream Day First Home	Sally's Spa	Build-a-lot	Sally's Spa	Bejeweled 2
2	Hidden Expedition: Amazon	Bejeweled 2	Mystery PI: Vegas	Risk II	Paradise Pet Salon	Sally's Salon
3	Big City Adventure: Sydney	Big City Adventure: Sydney	Little Shop: Road Trip	Virtual Villagers 3	Jojo's Fashion Show	Sally's Spa
4	Forgotten Riddles: Moonlight	Monopoly	Cate West: The Vanishing Files	Sally's Spa	Virtual Villagers 3	Cooking Academy
5	Hidden Mysteries - Civil War	Jojo's Fashion Show	The Mystery of the Crystal Portal	The Mystery of the Crystal Portal	Risk	Scrabble

sion show is unique enough that it can't really be called a time management game nor a match 3 game. The original Jojo's was extremely popular at in 2007 and was still topping some charts in 2008. Jojo's Fashion Show 2 debut in August of 2008 and topped the daily charts again but was too late in the year to rank highly in this analysis of the first 9 month of 2008. Cooking Academy is another popular

game of 2008 that doesn't really fit into any popular core play mechanic category.

Big Fish

As usually, the Big Fish Games' top 100 list was dominated by hidden object games. There were 81 different hidden object games in the Big Fish top 100 list during these 9 months. This doesn't count games that were released but never made the top 100. These 81 hidden object games account for an estimated 53% of the games sold on Big Fish. This dwarfs the next highest category of adventure games which accounted for only 14% of the units sold. Adventure games trail far behind hidden object games on Big Fish but this 14% sales proportion is higher than you will see adventures games on any other portal.

MSN

Like most portals, MSN sold more hidden object games than any other category and like most portals, time management games ranked #2. MSN's top seller list only lists 10 games and doesn't update very often so we only saw 17 hidden object games in this 9 month period.

Big Fish Q1-Q3 2008			
Core Mechanic	Est Sales	# Games	Top Games
Hidden Object	53%	81	MCF: Madame Fate, Hidden Expedition: Amazon, Big City Adventure: Sydney, Forgotten Riddles 2, Hidden Mysteries: Civil War, Escape The Museum, The Count Of Monte Cristo, The Secret of Margrave Manor, Blood Ties, The Lost Cases of Sherlock Holmes, Women's Murder Club, Natalie Brooks: Secrets of Treasure House, Mystery in London, The Sultan's Labyrinth, Curse of the Pharaoh: The Quest for Nefertiti, Mystery Chronicles: Murder Among Friends, Righteous Kill, Haunted Hotel, Dream Day First Home, Sprill 2
Adventure	14%	36	Azada: Ancient Magic, Azada, Dream Chronicles 2, Laura Jones and the Gates of Good and Evil
Time Management	10%	56	Ranch Rush, Magic Farm, Turbo Subs, Go-Go Gourmet
Sim	8%	28	Build-a-lot 2, Westward II, Virtual Villagers 3, Farm Frenzy 2, Farm Frenzy
Match 3	5%	45	Fishdom, 4 Elements, Caribbean Hideaway, Cradle of Rome, Hidden Wonders of the Depths
Other	10%	104	Fairway Solitaire, Chocolatier 2, Tri-Peaks 2

Real Arcade

Real Arcade is often one of the most balanced portals with nearly even proportions of hidden object, time management and match 3 games. But for this time period we see hidden object games selling more than twice as well as time management with match 3 games not far behind that.

Reflexive

Reflexive is fairly balanced this time around with hidden object games ranking #1 with only 27% of the sales and sims not too far behind with 20%. Reflexive is the only portal with sim selling such a large percentage.

Shockwave

Hidden object games rank unusually low on Shockwave accounting for only 9% of sales in this period ranking them 4th most popular play mechanic. Time management games were the most popular game type on Shockwave accounting for an estimated 46% of the sales. Sim games rank 2nd with 15% followed by the hard to categorize Jojo's Fashion Show games accounting for 9% of sales.

Yahoo

Yahoo also doesn't seem to favor hidden object games. Time management games are most popular on Shockwave followed by match 3 games. We have seen this same pattern on Yahoo in previous periods.

To dig into more details yourself go to the 'World Map' chart at CasualCharts.com and customize the options to show and date range and portals you are interested in.

About the Author

James C. Smith is one of the founders of Reflexive Entertainment. Tracking the history of the Top-10 lists is a part time hobby he started back in 2002. In 2005 James launched CasualCharts.com (a.k.a. game-sales-charts.com) to make interactive queries of his Top-10 database accessible to everyone. You can reach James at James@casualcharts.com

MSN Q1-Q3 2008			
Core Mechanic	Est Sales	# Games	Top Games
Hidden Object	37%	17	Dream Day First Home, Big City Adventure: Sydney, Agatha Christie: Peril at End House, Amazing Adventures The Lost Tomb, Dream Day Wedding 2, Mystery PI: The Vegas Heist, Women's Murder Club, The Secret of Margrave Manor
Sim	19%	9	Monopoly, Farm Frenzy, Virtual Villagers 3, Build-a-lot 2, Farm Frenzy 2
Time Management	15%	19	Go-Go Gourmet, Cake Mania 2, Go Go Gourmet: Chef of the Year, Sally's Spa, First Class Flurry
Match 3	12%	6	Bejeweled 2 Deluxe, Jewel Quest III, Magic Match Adventures, Fishdom
Jojo	5%	2	Jojo's Fashion Show, Jojo's Fashion Show 2
Other	11%	17	SCRABBLE Blast!, Chocolatier 2, Bookworm Deluxe

Real Arcade Q1-Q3 2008			
Core Mechanic	Est Sales	# Games	Top Games
Hidden Object	38%	31	Mystery PI: The Vegas Heist, Little Shop: Road Trip, Cate West: The Vanishing Files, The Mystery of the Crystal Portal, Hidden Relics, Big City Adventure: Sydney, Can You See What I See?, Blood Ties, Sunset Studio Deluxe, The Nightshift Code...
Time Management	18%	21	Sally's Spa, Jane's Hotel Family Hero, Posh Boutique, Sally's Salon...
Match 3	12%	17	Fishdom, Jewel Quest III, Rainbow Web 2, Charm Tale 2...
Sim	9%	10	Farm Frenzy 2, Build-a-lot 2, Farm Frenzy, Virtual Villagers 3, Westward II...
Adventure	3%	2	Dream Chronicles 2, Dream Chronicles
Jojo	3%	2	Jojo's Fashion Show, Jojo's Fashion Show 2
Other	17%	30	DragonStone, Ancient Quest of Saqqarah, Tropix 2...

Reflexive Q1-Q3 2008			
Core Mechanic	Est Sales	# Games	Top Games
Hidden Object	27%	58	The Mystery of the Crystal Portal, MCF: Madame Fate, Cate West: The Vanishing Files, Big City Adventure: Sydney, Mortimer Beckett and the Secrets of Spooky Manor, Mystery PI: The Vegas Heist, Women's Murder Club
Sim	20%	30	Build-a-lot, Virtual Villagers 3, Build-a-lot 2, Farm Frenzy, Farm Frenzy 2
Time Management	15%	47	Sally's Spa, Airport Mania: First Flight, Sally's Salon, Build in Time
Match 3	12%	37	Cradle of Rome, Jewel Quest III, Bejeweled 2 Deluxe, 4 Elements
Strategy	5%	9	Risk II, Chocolatier 2
Adventure	3%	7	Dream Chronicles 2, Escape From Paradise...
Other	17%	82	WWII Pacific Heroes, Ricochet Infinity, Star Defender 4, Elf Bowling 7 1/7, Luxor 3...

Shockwave Q1-Q3 2008			
Core Mechanic	Est Sales	# Games	Top Games
Time Management	46%	26	Sally's Spa, Paradise Pet Salon, Carrie the Caregiver 3, Ranch Rush, Fashion Boutique, Burger Shop, Turbo Subs, Go-Go Gourmet, Magic Farm, Jane's Hotel Family Hero, Home Sweet Home, Jane's Hotel...
Sim	15%	6	Virtual Villagers 3, Farm Frenzy 2, Build-a-lot, Build-a-lot 2, Westward II, Plant Tycoon
Jojo	9%	2	Jojo's Fashion Show, Jojo's Fashion Show 2
Hidden Object	9%	19	Women's Murder Club, The Mystery of the Crystal Portal, Little Shop: Road Trip...
Strategy	8%	3	Risk, Chocolatier 2, Tradewinds Caravans
Match 3	4%	5	Coffee Rush, Around the World in 80 Days, Fishdom, Jewel Match 2...
Solitaire	3%	1	Fashion Solitaire
Other	6%	9	Dream Chronicles 2, Cooking Academy

Yahoo Q1-Q3 2008			
Core Mechanic	Est Sales	# Games	Top Games
Time Management	42%	42	Sally's Salon, Sally's Spa, Dress Shop Hop, Pet Shop Hop, Wedding Dash 2, Cake Mania 3, Dairy Dash, Go-Go Gourmet, Posh Boutique, Turbo Pizza and Subs Combo, Turbo Pizza...
Match 3	16%	5	Bejeweled 2 Deluxe, Jewel Quest III, Jewel Quest II, Tropicabana...
Sim	10%	11	Monopoly, Build-a-lot 2, Virtual Villagers 3...
Jojo	8%	2	Jojo's Fashion Show, Jojo's Fashion Show 2
Hidden Object	7%	17	Dream Day Wedding 2, Dream Day First Home...
Word	7%	3	Scrabble Deluxe, Super TextTwist, SCRABBLE: Journey
C Academy	5%	1	Cooking Academy
Other	4%	13	Eye for Design, Supple, The Price is Right

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