Ten Game Design Lessons

from

Games-as-Service

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Playdom

casual connect

"It's a SERVICE. Not a game. It's a WORLD. Not a game. It's a COMMUNITY. Not a game. Anyone who says *it's just a game* is missing the point."

The Laws of Online World Design, c. 1997

http://www.raphkoster.com/gaming/laws.shtml

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Why does one create a service?

Most reasons are from subscription businesses:

- Lock in customers because of loss aversion

  "I'm used to having this, and if I stop paying, I'll lose it."

- Recurring revenue

  Users frequently fail to take the initiative on cancelling

  Razor and blades model, or content access model

- A way to prevent theft/piracy

  A network "dongle"

- Tiered pricing models via service plans

Loss aversion is greatly minimized

- Nothing is lost if you are absent

No recurring revenue model

- Microtransactions are king

- No concrete action required to exit service

Tiered pricing models are replaced with microtransactions

- No service plans; instead we have "whales"

But! A service provides re-engagement tools

Going back to
the dictionary
definition of
"service"

1. an **act of helpful activity**; help; aid: to do someone a service.

2. the supplying or **supplier of utilities or commodities,** as water, electricity, or gas, required or demanded by the public.

3. the providing or a provider of accommodation and **activities required by the public, as maintenance, repair,** etc.: The manufacturer guarantees service and parts.

Utilities

- ## Access being the most fundamental

  But keep in mind games are truly luxury goods

Commodities

- ## Virtual items

  Also, pure luxury goods

Maintenance

- ## Manifests in games primarily as data persistence

Repair

- ## An expectation of customer support

Helpful activity

- ## Our customers are connected to each other too

**Three classic
up-sell models**

The free sample model

- Give them a taste, they pay to get more because they like it.

  Free ice cream samples; free month of premium cable

The blocking model

- Allow advancement towards a goal, but make completion impossible/implausible without payment

  Collectible card games; too many auto mechanics ☹

The cheating model

- Let them purchase the equivalent of time or skill

  Buy a bigger gun; buy a FastPass to the head of the line

  Upsells are always about customer needs.

What this means

Fundamentally, your customer has an *emotional* relationship with your product

- You're not offering something they *need*

  Therefore no external factors will drive them to engage or re-engage

- They don't even have to walk away; exiting the service is passive

  They just "don't show up"

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You are in an emotional relationship with your customer

- They must come back because they want to

A single player game is like a one-night stand

A service game is like a marriage

In the long run, engagement drives revenue

Key emotional drivers:

- ## Guilt

  Failure to harvest crops in time

  Feeling like they abandoned their pets

- ## Love

  Truly enjoying the community they created

  The game becomes a hobby

- ## Obligation

  A feeling that they must support their friends

  Commitment fallacy: they signed up for it

- ## Pride and anger

  Defending or regaining standing

- ## Security

  Game as private refuge from real life

- ## Curiosity

  What happens next?

Take cues from serial storytelling

- **Cliffhangers**

  Our equivalent is delayed gratification, as in crop maturation

- **"Event" viewing**

  Themed releases of new content with "must-see" appeal; holidays, charity drives, and other such "specials."

- **Crossovers**

  The cross-promo bar is functionally equivalent, but consider the depth to which television does crossovers!

- **Arcs**

  Underutilized today, but early glimpses appearing

People get bored

- Huge benefits accrue from multiple playstyle support
- Multiple established models for playstyle

Bartle Four

- Achiever, Killer, Explorer, Socializer

  http://www.mud.co.uk/richard/hcds.htm

Yee's Motivations

- Advancement, Mechanics, Competition, Socializing, Relationships, Teamwork, Discovery, Roleplay, Customization, Escapism

  http://www.nickyee.com/daedalus/archives/print/001298.php

Lazzaro's Keys

- Hard Fun, Easy Fun, Altered States, People Factor

  http://www.xeodesign.com/xeodesign_whyweplaygames.pdf

Lesson #3: Playstyles as service driver

Lesson #4:
Lifetime is not
the same as
content

In packaged games, we thought of player lifetime as being equal to the length of the game.

- The industry gradually realized it was overbuilding the games!

In virtual worlds, we spoke of the "elder game"

- The alternate play style players pursued when the content ran out

In service games, huge benefit arises from algorithmic or systemic games rather than content

- Users consume content faster than any team can create it

  But content is great to sell. So, strike a balance there.

Jonathan Baron divides multiplayer games in two:

- ## Achievement Oriented:

  "The players who 'win' do so because they are the best at whatever the game offers."

- ## Cumulative Character:

  "Anyone can reach the pinnacle of achievement by mere persistence."

In achievement games, you are driven by Glory, achieved by Shaming others.

- ## This is where whales come from, and why PvP games drive them

Lesson #5:
Glory and
Shame

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Historically, player vs player competition games have higher churn

- Surprisingly, people dislike playing games just to lose repeatedly to people much better than them
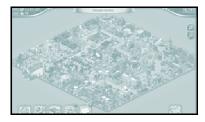
  "Humiliation Online" is a pretty lousy game concept

Social games tend to be cumulative character

- But it's not unusual to see the competitive characteristic present to drive revenue

- Often via non-zero-sum mechanics, so losers don't feel abused

The classic elder game is player expressivity

- No accident that iso decorators are such a major part of the social gaming arena

  As players master the rules, they start to invent their own goals and play their own way; they subvert, they ignore the stated goals, they grief others, they exploit for the fun of it, they drift into pure chat mode, they use tools for UGC
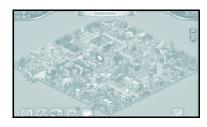
Using the game as a social signaling tool to others

A tribal identification mechanism, or a way to display conscientiousness (farming games), etc. Problem is, these are easily supplanted.

Game as a way to learn about yourself

- Mostly seen in virtual world spaces

  Play different character types, roleplay and experiment with identity, engage in politics, act out

Lesson #7:
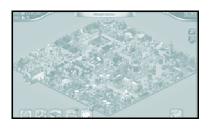## Expressivity, signaling, and self-discovery

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Lesson #7:
Expressivity, signaling, and self-discovery

Over time, your playerbase will come to be the group of people who most enjoy the style of play that your world offers.

- The others will eventually move to another game.

It is very hard to attract players of different gaming styles after the playerbase has been established.

- Any changes to promote different styles of play almost always conflict with the established desires of the current playerbase.

-- Jason Wilson, aka "Hanarra"

also from The Laws of Online World Design

Lesson #9:
Game design is
a contact sport

Game services are online

- The service itself is a medium of communication
- Which is unlike services throughout history

    It's not like you communicate through your plumbing or electrical wiring

This means brand and reputation management is critical. Best practices include

- Honesty
- A spokesperson that is like the typical user
- Regular non-salesy communication

    Also increases re-engagement

- Prompt responses to inquiries
- Firm hand on troublemakers

Lesson #9:
Game design is
a contact sport

Sub-Forums		Last Post
News and Announcements Get the latest updates on Gardens of Time here!	Threads: 11 Posts: 11	Chapter 11-Cowboys and India by StinkyTofoo 06-20-2011, 12:36 PM
General Discussion Discuss general topics about the game and get to know your fellow Time travelers!	Threads: 309 Posts: 4,668	Items By Location / Theme by sedge Today, 10:41 AM
Tutorials and Guides Place any tutorials you've written or guides in this forum!! ***SPOILER ALERT*** This forum may contain spoilers on upcoming scenes or content. Read at your own discretion	Threads: 6 Posts: 109	Wonders and Side Quest... by billiejosunrise 05-16-2011, 04:53 PM
Bugs & Technical Issues Helpful tips for troubleshooting known issues. For official help, please visit http://playdom.custhelp.com/	Threads: 45 Posts: 573	stars resetting by Sherry.berry69 Today, 10:04 AM
Suggestions and Feedback Got an idea for how to make the game better? Have some feedback? Let us know!	Threads: 195 Posts: 1,988	What Do You Like About The... by W.A. Today, 09:11 AM
Find Neighbors A place to meet new friends and fellow time travelers! Please keep all "add me" requests to this forum.	Threads: 5 Posts: 527	***Official "add me"... by MaraschinoC Today, 10:16 AM
Off Topic Take a break from time traveling and building your garden!	Threads: 24 Posts: 1,077	3 word story :D by -SassyLady- Today, 09:35 AM
Gardens of Time (Deutsch) Für unser deutsches Publikum	Threads: 7 Posts: 7	Nachbarn by fraupixel Yesterday, 01:27 PM
Gardens of Time (Español) Para nuestros jugadores de habla Hispana	Threads: 4 Posts: 5	Malas traducciones by XxGIRxX Yesterday, 02:02 PM
Gardens of Time (Français) Pour nos utilisateurs Français	Threads: 2 Posts: 2	Besoin d'aide en français... by doudoune 06-17-2011, 10:43 AM

Retail measures an instant: the sale

Most service industries measure longitudinally

- Every customer is known

  Often with extensive CRM

- Lifetime & churn

  Kind of hard to do this when users can vanish

- Customer segments

Social currently measures in time-slices

- Daily activity, revenue per day

- Lifetime is *computed* rather than a core metric

  Little sense of the arc *of a typical user*

  Leads to lots of re-acquisition

You're designing to up-sell luxury goods

That means you're selling emotion

And you are marrying the customer

- Learn to read their emotional desires

- Tell them a story, and don't forget date nights

- Keep the relationship fresh and varied

- You can't keep it going forever just on gifts of chocolates

- Give them moments of glory

- Protect them from humiliation

- Help them learn about themselves and be creative

- Hands off anyone else!

- Talk regularly and honestly

- Live in the now, but remember you're in this for the long haul

Resources

- The Laws of Online World Design
  http://www.raphkoster.com/gaming/laws.shtml

- Dr. Richard Bartle's Player Types
  http://www.mud.co.uk/richard/hcds.htm

- Nick Yee's research
  http://www.nickyee.com/

- Nicole Lazzaro's research
  http://www.slideshare.net/NicoleLazzaro

- Jonathan Baron's *Glory and Shame*
  http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/3395/glory_and_shame_powerful_.php

- Slides will be on my website: http://www.raphkoster.com

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