

From Concept

To Reality

A design project made by:

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March 20, 2009

Revised: May 4, 2009

1. Introduction

In this project I have chosen to work with idea creation and how to get from the idea phase to a finished, well organized and tested idea that could be developed. I chose this topic because I thought it would be interesting and that it could work as a learning experience for me, to see what I can produce and what is requested from me in a close to reality experience.

I chose to concentrate my work on downloadable games as I see a future in that part of the industry. In today's situation with the economy in the bottom, many publishers only develops the most secure type of games to be sure to make enough money and that is something that kills the creativity of the gaming industry. Last year in Sweden only three games building on new IP's made it up to the top ten list of the most sold games on all systems. On the system specific lists it looked the same, only a few new game IP's while most games are old franchises or spinoffs of other franchises.

With downloadable games the developer have an opportunity to try out new concepts or settings since the costs for developing a downloadable game are less than a retail game that is found in a physical game store or a super market. A downloadable game could be developed by single person but more often from five persons and up which reduces the budget for the game dramatically. Swedish developers have released a pair of downloadable games such as Crash Commando from Epos, Bionic Commando Rearmed from Grin and Commanders from South End.

To define downloadable games it is games found on any video game systems downloadable games services such as Xbox Live Marketplace on Microsoft Xbox 360, the Playstation Network Store on Sony Playstation 3 or the Shop channel on Nintendo Wii. On all of those services it is possible to find games for a small amount of money and that can be bought and downloaded directly on the video game system.

The variety of games on those systems is enormous with everything from simple remakes from older games to new ways of thinking in platform games and attempts to do something that haven't been done before. It is a very creative part of the industry and as I said before, a part of the gaming industry's future.

This type of games are even spreading into the handheld market where the Iphone receives a huge number of new games each month and at the same time it is rumored that the next Playstation Portable from Sony only will support downloadable titles bought from their Playstation Store, but that is just a rumor but it shows that there is a future in that kind of games.

The project has been divided into six phases where the amounts of concepts have been reduced between each one. In phase one the creation of 100 concepts was done and in phase two they were reduced to the 20 best concepts which was further explained in terms of goals and mechanics. In phase three only ten concepts were left and those were presented with a power point presentation each, explaining characters and story as well as a more in depth look at the goals and mechanics. In phase four only five concepts was left that was researched on similarities in other titles and the two most promising concepts where then chosen to the fifth phase where two simple but explaining prototypes where built. The last phase focused on creating a design document about the most promising concept of all.

2. Documents

Document Name	Content
Lovdahl_blog	All my blog entries organized in order.
Lovdahl_design_document	In this document I describe the final concept in detail, how it works, what characters there is and the whole story and even more things.
Lovdahl_final_report	A document with information on the whole process, what changes have been made and a post mortem. Included is a list of all the documents in the project.
Lovdahl_methods	A document with every method, question and tool I have used and how I have used them. Also included are a list of the different software programs I have used during the project.
Lovdahl_ms3_report	In this document I describe what I had done for the first couple of weeks as well as what I was going to do for the rest of the time
Lovdahl_project_plan	A detailed plan on my project with information on topic, schedule, goal and purpose of the project.
Lovdahl_proposal	In this document I explain what I wanted to work with and how I planned to make it possible. I also gave some sources that I would use in the project
Lovdahl_reference_list	A reference list of databases and books I have used. Do not contain references for pictures in presentations or games that have been mentioned.
Lovdahl_research	This document contains my background research for the 5 concepts that were left in phase 4

The following documents can be found in the folder “ideas”

Document name	Content
Lovdahl_hundred_ideas_list	All 100 concepts in one list in their original statement as when I first created them
Lovdahl_list_of_twenty	The 20 best concepts can be found in this document. They are further explained then in the list with all hundred ideas.

The following documents can be found in the folder “Presentations”

Document name	Content
Lovdahl_echo_post_mortem	My post mortem presentation that I held March 18, 2009.
Lovdahl_echo_presentation	My presentation of Echo that contains story, character, how you play the game and what the goals are to mention a few things. The presentation was held March 18, 2009

Lovdahl_milestone3_presentation	A presentation on what I had done and what I was supposed to do the upcoming weeks, I also presented my topic and how I had organized the work. The presentation was held February 19, 2009
Lovdahl_pres_echo	A presentation made in phase 3 in which I explain what Echo is and what the goals are and such.
Lovdahl_pres_electricity	Same as above but for the concept Electricity!
Lovdahl_pres_elemental_railroad	Same as above but for the concept Elemental Railroad
Lovdahl_pres_litd	Same as above but for the concept Lost in the Desert
Lovdahl_pres_river	Same as above but for the concept River
Lovdahl_pres_rize	Same as above but for the concept Rize
Lovdahl_pres_ssb	Same as above but for the concept Spacestation Breakout
Lovdahl_pres_sunvsclouds	Same as above but for the concept Sun vs. Clouds
Lovdahl_pres_tree	Same as above but for the concept the Tree
Lovdahl_pres_triangle_evolution	Same as above but for the concept Triangle Evolution
Lovdahl_presentations_text	A text version of all the presentations in phase 3, created before the power point presentations where done. It contains answers on all questions I used to explain my concepts with.

The following documents can be found in the folder “prototypes”

Document name	Content
Lovdahl_echo_playtest_report_1	A play test report for the concept Echo where I analyze how the play test went, what worked well and what did not and what I could change for the next iteration on the prototype
Lovdahl_echo_playtest_report_2	As above
Lovdahl_echo_playtest_report_3	As above
Lovdahl_echo_playtest_report_4	As above
Lovdahl_River_playtest_report	A play test report for the concept River where I describe the meaning of the play test, how it turned out and what I would do in the next one.
River	A compressed file with the software prototype of River built in Adventure Game Studio, use WinRar to decompress it and then use the “river” file to start the game.

3. Change Management

Schedule:

My planed schedule looks like this:

Week	Phase	Work
1	1	Come up with 100 concepts
2	1	Come up with 100 concepts
3	2	Explain 20 concepts further
4	3	Create 10 Power Point presentations
5	4	Research 5 titles
6	5	Create one prototype
7	5	Create one prototype
8	6	Write Design Document
9		

My executed schedule looks like following:

Week	Phase	Work
1	1	Come up with 100 concepts
2	1	Come up with 100 concepts
3	2	Explain 20 concepts further
4	3	Create 10 Power Point presentations
5	4	Research 5 titles
6	5	Create one prototype and research three titles
7	5	Create one prototype and research two titles
8	6	Write Design Document
9		Create the final report

The schedule was kept really good, except for the research that I had to redo but it wasn't any problems. I had planned my schedule so that I had some time over if I had a day of down time or if I got sick from the beginning. Sometimes I had some problems with getting a presentations time with my mentor who had filled schedule and lost a day here and there but I knew that could happened and I planed that in the project plan.

Goals

My goals in the project plan red as follow:

"One well explained game concept with a playable prototype and a design document on at least 20 pages.

Also I shall have one hundred game concepts, including the one that I have written a design document on, where 20 of them shall be explained further than the original concept then ten of those twenty shall have a presentation which explains their core game play and mechanics. Five out of those ten shall have been further researched to see if there is something similar released and if there is, what are the differences between them. Two playable prototypes out of those five ideas shall be developed."

I created all of those goals in the end of the project. The purpose of the project is another part of the goal; this is what I wrote in the project plan as the purpose:

“To learn different techniques to create game ideas and game concepts that can be developed to playable and/or sellable games. To learn how to communicate my thoughts with persons around me so that I get them to see what I see with the idea. To push my own creativity and think in new ways and not come up with the same things that already have been done, to come up with unique selling points that makes the games better than the ones already on sale or in development.

To learn how to develop quick prototypes that shows the core of the game in a good and interesting way and to use playtestings in giving ways. To learn what is required of a game design document that holds industry standard and also to write one.”

The first point I reached, I did learn different techniques to create concepts that could be developed to real games. I also pushed my own creativity to create games with new features; Echo is a great example of that where the player controls the draw distance with his voice. Create unique selling points or create something that makes my concepts better than the ones already in development or on sale. I would say I reached that point on certain ideas, some ideas might not have been very unique but overall I created concepts that haven't been done too many times.

To communicate my thoughts and ideas is probably one of the few points I might not have succeeded, although it isn't a complete failure. I have gotten better on how to get out what I want but people still wonder sometimes what I am talking about.

I learned to develop quick prototypes and I also learned that paper and pen prototypes are still a form of prototypes to be counted with as it is a fast and easy way of creating something workable. In my prototypes I learned to show the core game play in a simple prototype which was one of the points in purpose.

My design document could be used as a game treatment but there are things missing like all models and textures but as I lack that experience I can't really write it down. If the game would be developed I would team up with the leads of the project and discuss those topics.

Other

I had planned to use Adobe Flash or Blender for my prototypes but I change direction and went for easier methods like pen and paper and Adventure Game Studio. The reason for this change of direction is that I a couple of hours with Adobe Flash and tried to create something playable but it did not want to work so I decided to try doing the prototype with Adventure Game Studio as it is a lot easier program to use.

For my research I had planned to check Xbox Live Marketplace, Wii Shop Channel and Playstation Store to look for similar games, I extended my research and searched for similar titles on Giant Bomb.

4. Post Mortem

What went wrong?

Subject Presentation

My subject was very clear to me but not to everybody, I had not presented it clear enough which led to misunderstandings and that the subject seemed confusing and fuzzy. I thought that I had presented it clear enough with examples of games that can be found in the genre and presented where they could be bought but it did not help and this brings me in on the next topic of what went wrong.

Other peoples knowledge

I know a whole lot about games, I update myself each day about new games and I have read gaming magazines the last 10 years so games are a natural part of my life. My mistake during the project was that I didn't think about that people might not be as updated as me and not know about the games I present as examples. I used the game Flower quite a lot in my presentations since it is newly released and have been well received and it can only be found on the Playstation Store but in the class, we are only two people who actually own a Playstation 3 and most people prefers to play games on their PC's. I have to realize that people don't always know as much about games as I do, even Annakaisa who works with games or doesn't know everything, when I presented Echo to her she asked whether there are any similar games that uses a headset as control mechanism and I mentioned Tom Clancy's End War which wasn't a title she have heard about but I thought that it was a well known title which it probably isn't.

Background Research

Background research was the main point for phase 4 and I didn't knew if the research should be my own thoughts or actual research so I mailed Annakaisa Kultima in the beginning of the week and asked but did not receive an answer until Thursday on our Skype meeting. I chose to do my research in the way I thought would work which was to write my own thoughts, I should mention that I had a couple of questions to answer, and thought that it would be enough.

That research wasn't enough and it shouldn't be my own thoughts, it should be researched on the internet which I hadn't done enough so that was one of the things that went wrong. I had to remake the background research during the weeks to come but I did it and it was a much better research both in my eyes and trough Annakaisas eyes

What went right?

Schedule

My time plan went very well, I had planned in to make one phase each week except for the first and fifth phase since the first was a start up period and in the fifth I had to build two prototypes and I made the calculation that with some play testing and iterations I needed two weeks.

I had also planned for some days to be dead, when I either wait for a result or some time with my mentor or if I would be sick one day or be out of motivation. Stuff like this that is uncertain always happens so I took the safe road with my schedule and planed for it. It would have been any major changes if I did not, we are not talking about a whole week but I wanted to be on the safe side.

Subject

My subject to work with during the project, downloadable games, was totally right in time. The last two years the market for those kinds of games has exploded and one downloadable game was nominated to a game of the year award on the Swedish Dataspelsgalan (Computer games festival) which was held for the industry in the middle of March. Downloadable games are released each week on Xbox Live Marketplace; a couple of them are rereleases or remakes of older titles and some are brand new games. There could only be one hotter subject to work with and that is Iphone games but after that, downloadable games come. Each console of this generation, Xbox 360, Playstation 3 and Nintendo Wii have a place to buy downloadable titles on, Microsoft has even opened a section where even simpler games can be released with Xbox Live Community games. With all this I just want to say that downloadable games are on the wall and that I am happy I chose to work with those kind of concepts even though some had their doubts.

The blog

For this project we should blog three times a week which I think is a good way of reporting what you are doing, how you are working and your progress. I usually at least three times a week, often five times and I wrote what I had done, I explained my work and the questions I asked myself in the process. I think the blog could be a good thing the day I or anyone else in the class are looking for a job and if they ask to see what we have done earlier or how we work, there will always be the blog to show them which is one reason to why I kept writing in it.

High Standard

To keep a high standard could vary from person to person but I believe that I kept a high standard throughout the project; the only negative is the first research. My games was all new games, they did not only build on old mechanics or on old franchises, sure I had many games with similarities with many other games; one game was a management type of game where you should build a living area in a glacier and I compared the game with any Tycoon or Sim game but it was still a new game since it took place inside a glacier.

I also believe that much of what I have written keeps high standard, it is no slang in the texts and most texts is well written. I also have documented very well on what I have done and such in my blog and kept my schedule which also is a part of the high standard.

What did I learn through this process?

Discipline

During this project I have made all my work from home which can be really difficult if you don't have the discipline. I have learned that the school/work goes first and that games come in second place on the schedule. I had kept my schedule all the time which have given me the time to play some games on the evening or late afternoon. If I would have had the discipline I would have played games the first three or four days and then done all my work the last two days working to many hours which gives a negative effect on the result.

Prototyping

I have learned that pen and paper prototypes are a great way to show the core game play or mechanics if possible. Before I started with the prototypes I thought that pen and paper prototypes aren't as cool as a software prototype and as always, I wanted a cool prototype, something flashy

with great graphic and so. It was first when I read the book Game Design Workshop that I started to think about doing a pen and paper prototype. It is much easier and only requires a bit of paper, some markers and some other stuff that I can either find at home or find in a shop down town and I came up with a method to make my concept work as a pen and paper prototype.

Idea creation methods

In the first phase of the project I had to come up with 100 game concepts which can be tricky but I used seven different methods of which six can be found in the Game Design Workshop book. I learned which is good and which is bad ones and which ones to use in different positions. For example the List technique where you have to write down a lot of words that you come to think of and that revolves around the topic for the list, that technique would work really well when coming up with weapons, enemies, or similar but it wasn't the best one to use when coming up with all new concepts. Those that worked well for coming up with new concepts are Randomize and Idea cards and those two methods brought me half of my concepts. So that is something I can use the next time when I am coming up with new game concepts or places for the game to take place in or weapons for a game.

Knowledge

This is a topic I already have mentioned earlier under "What went wrong" but I learned that people do not know as much about games as I do and I have to remember that and take that into consideration and adjust my papers so that people can follow me in my concepts. It is of no use if I mention a lot of titles as reference titles in my work if no one know what those titles are.

What would I do differently now?

I would have done my first research a lot better but with lack of instructions and motivation that week it did not went as planned. I would have focused a couple of questions for each concept, concentrating on the mechanics and characters of the concepts to see if I could find something similar. I would also have research more in depth of the concepts, do a background research for more than the mechanics and such, and maybe search for information about the country that the game takes place in to make it feel right as well as names on characters and architecture from the right time. To take the research to the next level in an early stage, I now made the in depth research when writing the design document which took some time away from me.

In retrospective I could have compressed my schedule and done more each day, I could also have tried to get my meetings with Ted on Fridays instead of Mondays which would have made the whole weekend open for work. It would have been possible to actually do this since I had time off a couple of days.

I would present my subject in a better and clearer way to make people aware of what I am working with. It could be done by showing pictures of downloadable games, show the interface of each downloading service that I focused on, I could have explained the subject in simpler words and not using a lot of gaming words but instead keeping it to plain English.

I would have called the people I asked to be my mentor instead of sending e mails to them, a conversation over the phone can sometimes be easier to understand and not as easily ignored as an e mail.

I would use a lot more pictures if I had the chance to do something differently, in all parts from presentations to concepts, a picture can say more than a 1000 words which is true. Create own pictures to explain situations and also use pictures as references to graphics, situations and similarities.

I shouldn't have stopped at 100 ideas, I started with a new idea creation technique with only three concepts to fill but I should have created as many as I could to see what it could give, I might have missed a great concept that I don't know about since I stopped after reaching 100 concepts. I should also have used idea methods later on in the process and not only in the first phase, they could have been used in close to every phase if used right.

How would I manage the risks in the next project?

For my next project I would plan my schedule as I did in this project, plan it so that I have time for accidents. You never know when you get sick or if you get something urgent to do some day and that's when it is good to have those days. It is also easier and better to push things towards yourself than pushing them away from you, if I would be finished with one thing I could always start with the next thing after that instead of pushing it forward and miss deadlines and in the end screw it all up.

I would use more common words when explaining concepts and I would refer to games with pictures instead of text only, I would try to make it a lot easier to understand even if you are not into gaming. I won't take for granted that people know a lot about games and adjust my texts for the audience.

For the research part I now know that a great place to find information and a lot of gaming titles are Giant Bomb and I would use it for my next project for sure. I would also mix my own thoughts with the research that I made to get my points out with the information from the research. I would take the research a step further and do a more in depth research about religion, politics, country, peoples and culture to mention a few topics; to make the game feel real.

I would use different idea methods for different moments now when I know which ones that works at which times, I would use randomize or idea cards in the beginning and then switch over to the list method when exploiting the idea.