

Game Design Document

Game Journalism Story.

1.1 Intro

You play as an aspiring games journalist who wants to have the most successful gaming website. In this game all consoles and games are made up and fictional but some are satire of pre-existing consoles in order to make the player aware of certain real life situations that have happened as discussed in the background review. The player will be given offers and gifts by publishers that would make it easier if accepted. But does the player allow their success to come at a cost of their integrity. The game is played from a 2d perspective in the office of wherever you are currently working.

The goal of the game will be reached once the player is working for the most successful publication. The lose condition is if they go into more than £50,000 in debt. Money is taken from the players account each month to account for living costs like rent and food each month. The player is also required to purchase games and consoles as they come out to be able to provide "current" news coverage unless of course publishers and manufacturers decided to give the player these consoles. The bulk of the game will be made up of the player performing press related tasks which take the form of mini-games. Things like writing game reviews and previews will require the player to actually type into the game and meet a word count similar to how real reviews often have a word limit they must reach for the writers to be paid.

1.2 Characters

Throughout the course of the game the player will meet many different NPC's (Non Player Characters) and companies the player is able to interact with any character on the screen by clicking or touching them. Each NPC has its own function some might be just there for idle chitchat and help flesh out the world others may link to the player getting a job at a different company or may have a lead on an interesting story that could be published.

Random NPC: This NPC will be generated at runtime. This NPC will be used to flesh out offices or press conferences. On being spoken to they can very rarely (10% chance) give a lead on a story, otherwise they just say stuff at random e.g "Really excited for *insert game*!!"

Company Snitch: The company snitch can be from any of the games fake developers or publishers and will appear in the office of the player saying they have information. Sometimes this information will be for a price other times in exchange for a favour.

Manager: If the player chooses to work for a pre-existing company they will have a manager who will allocate what work they need to do and tell them which games to review. They will also be the NPC that tells the player off if the player does something like score a game low when they weren't meant to. If the player speaks to them during normal game play they will sometimes give them more work saying that if they have time to talk then more work could be done.

Player: The player is the character that the player creates at the beginning of the game. One of the issues that the game is trying to tackle is the hatred and aggression that players face and to do this the player is allowed to customise and create their character and pick a gender or no gender at all. This is done as it has been proven that having some degree of customisation will increase the player's perceived presence in the game (Bailey, R. 2009). The intention is that when the player character is given hateful comments for something they wrote they realise how it must feel. These customisable choices will affect how other NPC's in the game interact with you. Fans will use your gender as insults and will be more sexist towards female characters to better highlight the sexism that a female working in the industry faces.

Companies: There will be many fake companies in the game that will exist to highlight which companies are known for doing shady business practices as highlighted in the background research. Most of them will be parody's of existing companies: Zony, MicroHard, Wintendo, Good Dog, Rational Games, SnowStorm, Tigerhead, Team18, Mediocre, Filmstar, Finite ward, 3 arch. Some company names will be randomised as well to make the game world feel more alive. The player will have a reputation with each of these companies that starts at neutral and goes either way from there depending on the player's actions. If they like you they are more likely to send you free copies of games and consoles, if they don't like you then they won't contact you with any information or invite you to press events. The game companies will each have a set of characters associated with them who the player will interact with directly.

Company PR: The company PR character will be the one that contacts the player with details of previews, reviews, news. However they will also contact the player sometimes if they the player is giving their games low scores or unfavourable reviews they won't explicitly state to increase the score but it will be hinted at. If the player is publishing leaked information from a company without its permission the PR will contact them telling them to not publish it or they will face consequences to mimic incidents that were found during research. The PR's when contacting the player will also make light conversation with the player and will try to befriend them in order to humanise the company to the player. They will follow some of the characteristics outlined by Coulson to allow for players to form emotional attachment to them, this includes things like friendliness and usefulness to the player (Coulson, M, 2012). Each PR will have a friendship meter separate from the companies.

Company Developer: Developers of companies will occasionally contact the player if the player gives their game an exceptionally good or bad review thanking them or berating them for their actions. If the player does give a game bad reviews they will offhandedly mention things like how they won't get a bonus due to the Metacritic average going down to highlight how some companies weigh so heavily on critic's opinions. Developer's names will be randomised but saved for each game so the player could get contact from the same developer if they review games the same developer worked on.

Game Fanatics: Fans of games will comment on your reviews and previews of games. Each fan

will be randomly assigned some stats at runtime and the comments they post will be based on this. For example the Fan has a likeness of 10 for “War of Duty” and the player reviews it as 7/10 they will negatively comment on the review the contents of this comment can be changed by the player’s gender. These comments can be both semi-randomly generated or pulled from a list of comments taken from other websites. Fans are also the only NPC capable of seeing the player’s level of corruption and will comment on it in reviews claiming that they have been paid off for a positive review. Fans have no direct contact with the player bar the comment section and the players in game email.

1.3 Core Gameplay

The core of the game is based on the Tycoon / management genre of games and will be on the 2d plane. It can be split up into several sections discussed below.

1.3.1 Office

The office serves as the hub of the game and is where the player will be able to access all of the other aspects of the game. The player is able to walk around the office and talk to any NPC’s if there are any. When special conditions are met this is where Company PR NPC’s will appear and the player can talk to them from here using the chat interface detailed in 4.3.7.

The main thing in the office is the player’s desk and from the desk the player can access the computer which is what gives different options to the player. The options that will be available to the player are

Check Email - The player will be able to read and reply to emails, the reply option will be limited to predetermined replies like “Yes” or “No”. The content of these emails can be about upcoming videogame releases, orders from managers, invites to conferences and general correspondence from companies.

Order Games/Consoles – Selecting this option will open up an interface that mimics an online web store from here they will be able to purchase games and consoles using money from the player’s bank account. These will then arrive on the player’s desk instantly and the player will be able to then Review/Preview the games. Buying games and Consoles will take up a very large portion of the player’s cash flow to try and force them into being nice to developers to get free ones to mimic the symbiotic relationship that was established in the research. It is worth adding that in order to stay current with the industry the player will have to own the required consoles that new games are for In order to review them.

Review – This option will take the player into the Review mini game discussed in 4.3.5 after playing the mini game the player will be able to type up a review for the game up to 140 characters and then depending on if there working for a company with an existing review score system they either have to obey that or can leave out score entirely, this will affect how many views the review gets though.

Preview – The Preview option is very similar to Review option as it will open up a preview mini game detailed in 4.3.5 the difference being they will not have to give a score. The preview option will only be available if the player has been given the opportunity to preview an unreleased game by either the boss or a developer which would be found out through the in game email.

Post News – The player receives news by way of press releases from the in game email system from developers and publishers and can reword the press release to form news story to get page views. This is done similar to the review system but in this way the player cannot type any words only rearrange pre-existing words and sentences.

1.3.4 Mechanics

Page Views – Will be the main driving force behind the player's actions. All Reviews/Previews and News that the player posts onto their in game news site will start getting views. The amount of views that the article will get are dependent on varying factors. Reviews gain more views if the game is recently released and has a review score. If the review doesn't have a score then page views will be significantly reduced as found out during the research that review scores are the main thing viewers look for in reviews not the content of the review. If the reviewer scores games radically different from other critics then it may lead to more or less views depending on circumstances this is to reflect how in the eyes of fans the press's opinion doesn't matter. Previews and News will both generate more views the more recent it is in game time and as mentioned before bonuses can be applied to previews from trade shows.

Money – At the end of each month the player will receive a pay check either from advertisers if they choose to work for their own blog or from the company they decided to work for. The amount of money they receive will be based on how many page views they have gained that month. An example case of this would be the player has had 25000 page views on the website this month which at £0.02 a view would equal £500 for a month. At the end of the month the player is also charged for living costs which include food and rent this is taken out automatically but the player is made aware of when it's happening. Money can be used to buy new games and consoles for review and for travel expenses to go to events and must be balanced by the player to make sure not to go into too much debt and lose the game. Money has been chosen to play an important role as found out during the research it's very hard for journalists starting out to actually make enough money to live let alone buy the games and consoles needed for their job.

Time – Time passes by automatically with a day being 30 seconds in real time making a month take 15 minutes. Time's main feature is to make the game feel like it's moving forward and will control the release of new games and consoles.

Company Opinion – This is an invisible stat that isn't able to be seen by the player which governs how friendly a company is to a player. Giving a company's games good reviews and coverage will increase the friendliness with them and increase the chance of them sending review copies

and freebies. Negative press will decrease how much they like to the point of being blacklisted where you won't be invited to anything by that company at all. This has been added to subtly suggest how symbiotic the press and publishers have to be with each other as evidence during the review.

Player Corruption – Is another stat that is invisible to the player that represents how “corrupted” they are, this word is being used in the sense of accepting lots of free games from publishers or for allowing them to purchase good reviews or being too friendly with a company all of which will increase the players corruption stat as after all the player is meant to be unbiased and give their own subjective opinion. As this stat is invisible the player is unaware that perhaps they are doing things that aren't really consider good this is based on the information found in the literature review that said how very few game journalists are actually corrupt but most do stuff without realising it. The only way a player will be able to tell if they are becoming corrupt is from the comment system on their articles they post online as the NPC Fans will pick up on this and comment saying things like “They have been paid off by Zony” . Corruption cannot be reduced in any way to represent how once the audience has a perceived you to be corrupted you can't change that.

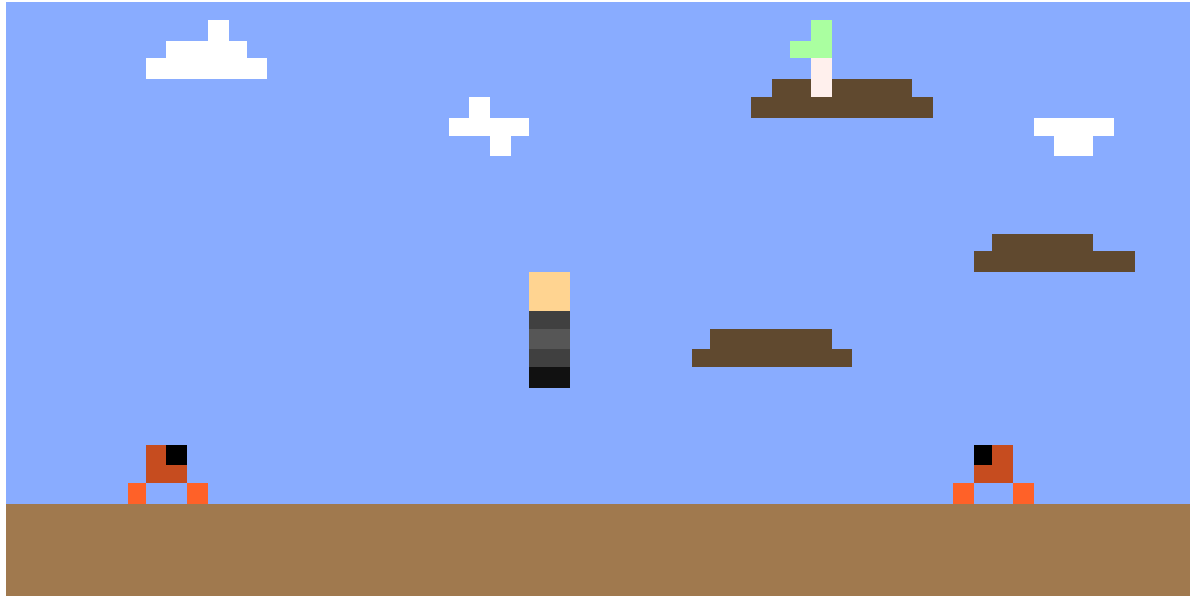
1.3.5 Mini-games

As mentioned previously when the player picks a task to perform from the computer a mini game can happen depending on what task they picked changes the type of mini game.

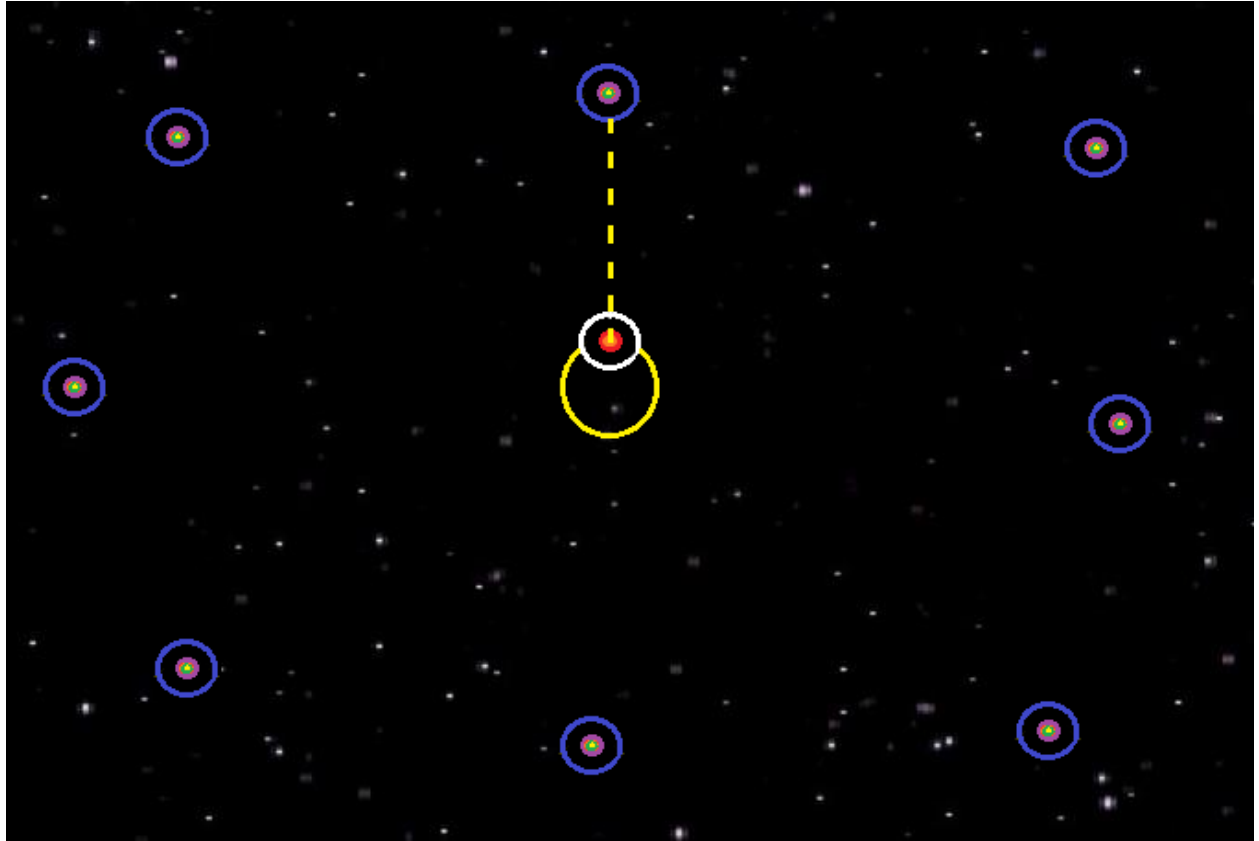
Review/Preview – Both the review and preview will play out exactly the same except that the preview will be shorter and at the end they will write a preview rather than a review for the game. The content of each mini game will vary depending on the genre of the game that the player is reviewing but the core of it is very short < 20 second games that are similar in gameplay to the Warioware,inc. Mega Microgames(Nintendo, 2003) games although they would not be as random as them. Each genre would have a core mini game which would remain the same with sprites and minor elements that would be randomised for each game unless it was a sequel. There will be x different genres of games with their titles randomised games that score well with critics including the player will get sequels more often.

Each game lasts 20 - 30 seconds there will be several possible variations of sprites that are also chosen at runtime. the game difficulty can vary to add more variation.

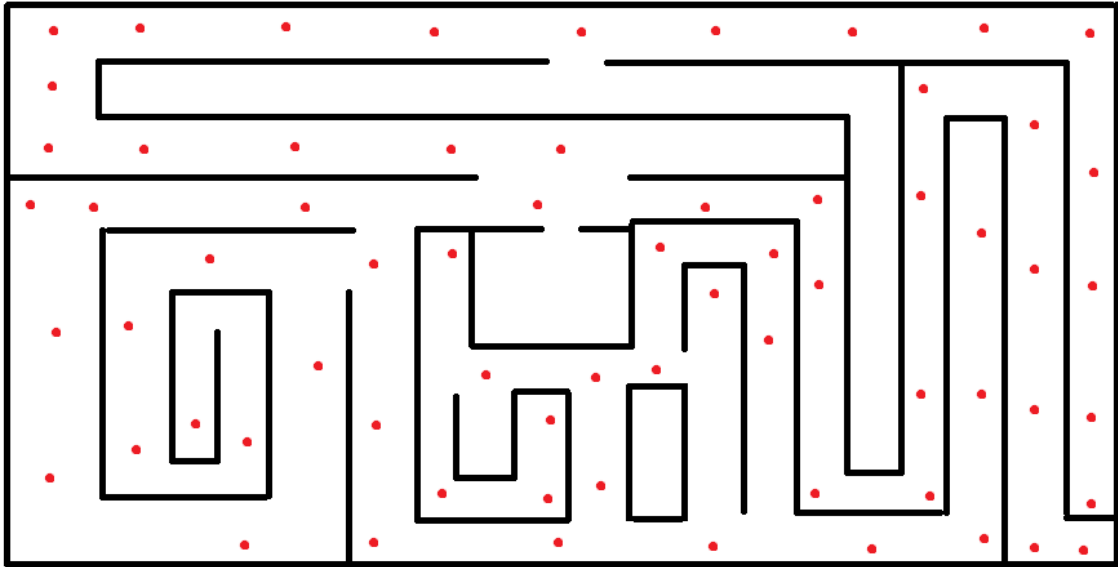
Action – 2d Platformer with a couple of basic platforms and an end goal to the or left of the screen. the level would be comprised of several platforms and enemies that the player must navigate. These would randomly generate randomly at runtime. The end goal of the level is signified by a marker which e.b a flag post. The controls of game are simple arrow directional movement and space to jump a distance.



Defense – Turret defence style game player is placed in the centre enemies come from 360 degrees around the player and must defend for the duration of the game time. Score is based on how long the player can defend the enemies from reaching inside the centre yellow circle, difficulty advanced by increasing the amount of enemies and/or their speed. The player controls the character in the middle, movement is limited to only left and right and along the path of the yellow circle, the player can shoot upwards relative to their position on the yellow circle. Controls are simple arrow keys for left and right respectively and space for shoot.



Maze – Pac man clone. will pick from several mazes and sprites. player must escape from center or make it to the center. Basic gameplay, similar to PacMan. Player runs around maze picking up coloured orbs to score points. Orbs are positioned in such a manner that the player is encouraged to go over every area of the base. Enemies will be added just like with PacMan, however the graphical style will be quite different in order to keep the two games separate. In the full game, maybe a possible negative review for a game like this could be that it is too similar to a “previously existing title” Below is a mock-up of how it might look, although games of this type are pretty self-explanatory. I apologise in advance for the colour scheme.



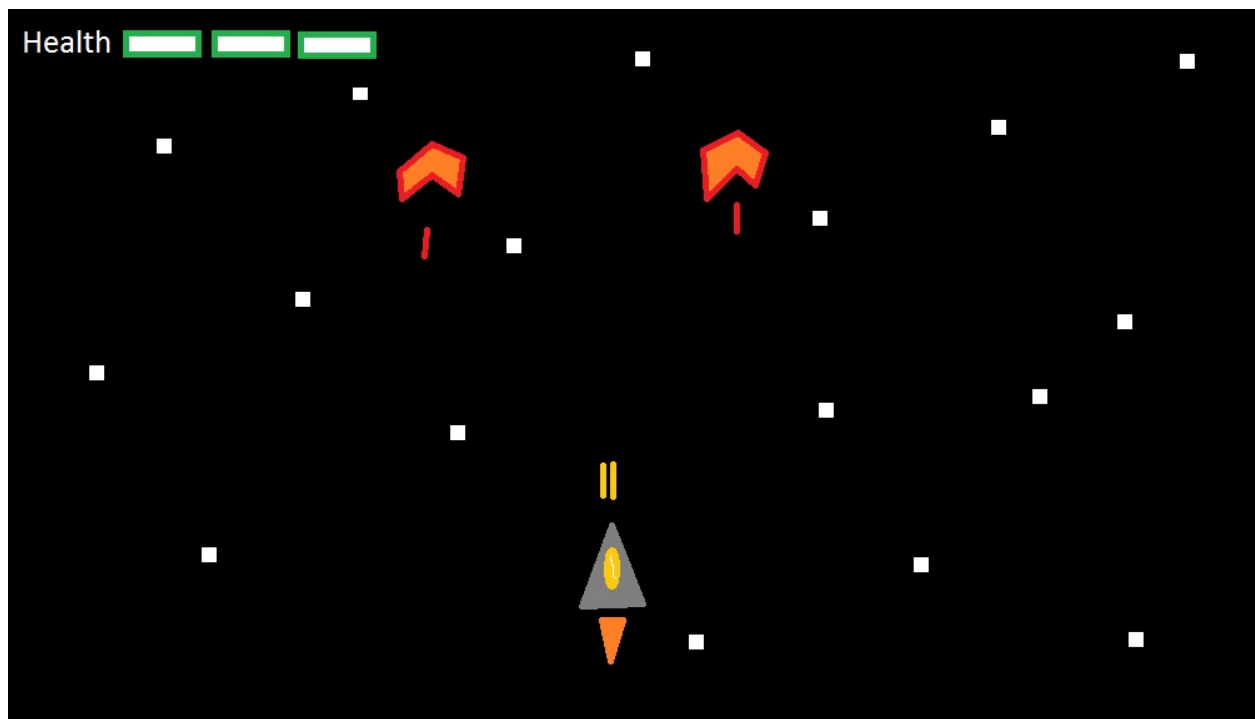
Driving – Top down control of a car doing laps on a track. Game ends after 1 to 3 laps are complete



This image represents what will be a clone of the original game “micro machines”

Racing-A top down style racing game, similar to the original micro machines game. The player will race between 1-3 laps from 1 of up to 5 randomly chosen circuits. The player will race up to 3 AI controlled opponents. The player will need to avoid colliding with obstacles and opponents but most importantly, come 1st!

Space – Side scrolling game where the player takes control of a spaceship. By moving up and down the player will be required to survive for the duration of the game, or kill all enemies on screen. The player will have a health bar, which will deplete as the player gets hit. If the player is hit 3 times they will ‘die’.



FPS - doom/ shooting gallery low res to fit the rest of the game. using mouse controls.



Optional time constraint. 2d fighting game - smashes the button till someone gets punched. button has to repeatedly be pressed to keep the marker in the green section of a bar.

The purpose of these games is to be basic and quick it would be silly to have the player play through a full game and review it. Each game will have their textures assigned to them at runtime to allow for more perceived diversity. It is intended that after playing the game for some period of the time the player may feel like they are just reviewing the same stuff over and over again to mimic current copycat trends in the industry.

Directly after the player has played one of the mini games the writing interface pops up, the user can then write a short review of the game that they have just played up to a limit of 140 characters. And then if it's a review give it a score if they wish using their current companies scoring system. If it's a preview then it doesn't need this step and is ready to be published. The actual content of the review means nothing to the game as the NPC Fans and Companies only care about the score that the player has given evidenced by the research about how companies only care about Metacritic scores. Fans comments will only ever comment on the score and either negatively or positively towards it. The point trying to be raised is that it doesn't matter about anything other than the score and if they choose to forgo a score the article will have a reduced rate of views to further this point.

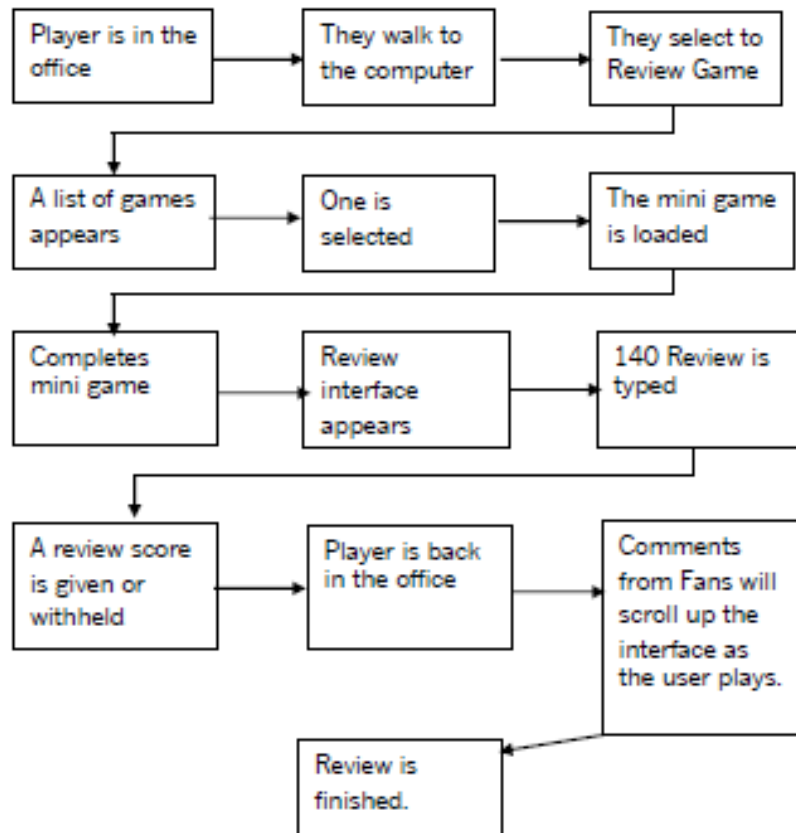
1.3.7 Chat

The chat system will be a simple barebones system where when the player clicks or touches on a player they will engage in conversation and may provide other actions for the player to engage in. The chat system will only allow for predetermined responses for when further player

input is required.

1.3.8 Game Flow

To better illustrate how the game will flow when a player is playing it below are some diagrams to display this. Reviewing a game



Starting Out - Game Beginnings

- Main menu screen boots up displaying the title of the game in the chosen art style with npcs walking along the bottom of the screen. The two options available to the player here will be New Game or Load Game. Load Game will allow the player to continue from where they left off.
- New Game the player will be in their office, a dialog box will pop up stating the aims of the game telling the player to go the door to pick up mail(A game has arrived) upon picking this mail up another prompt tells the player to go to the computer to review it. When at the computer the screen comes up as shown in the visual section. Prompts will describe what each option does to the player the first time they do this with a command to play the game at the end. Once the player has played the game they are then told to review it. This ends the tutorial section of the game. As new things are introduced like NPC's and Companies prompts will come up on the screen to give a brief description.

UI

The UI is shown in the visual section and aims to be very minimalist only showing the player the information they currently need. The UI for the computer is to stay within the theme shown in the prototype.

Controls

The player is only able to move on the 2d plane left and right whilst in the office. This will be done using either the A/D buttons or the Left/Right Arrow keys. Interacting with anything will be done with the mouse clicks or touch(on mobile devices). The controls from the minigames vary for each one but have been detailed in their respective sections.

Winning conditions.

The game never officially ends but the player can be considered to be at winning conditions if they are earning more money from pageviews then they spend each month and are getting positive feedback from the fanbase and companies.

1.3 Platform and Target Audience

The game has been designed to be suited to be played in short bursts of 5minutes or under but can also be played for longer than this, which makes it highly suitable for Mobile and Tablet distribution as well as the PC platform. For the mobile versions of the game it can be distributed through Apples iOS Appstore for a relatively small charge and on the Android Play Store for £15.00 to gain a developers license. Distributing via these platforms will allow the game to reach a high audience of casual users and hopefully make them aware of the issues raised in the research. The PC version would be distributed via Steam as this again allows it to reach a very wide and broad audience made up of varying play styles.

1.4 Aesthetics

The visual style of the game will be simple pixel art. This has been chosen as the developers of the game aren't great artists and the game will have a much more professional looking product by using stylised pixel art which works to the strength on the designers. Below is an initial mood board to help get a feel of the style.

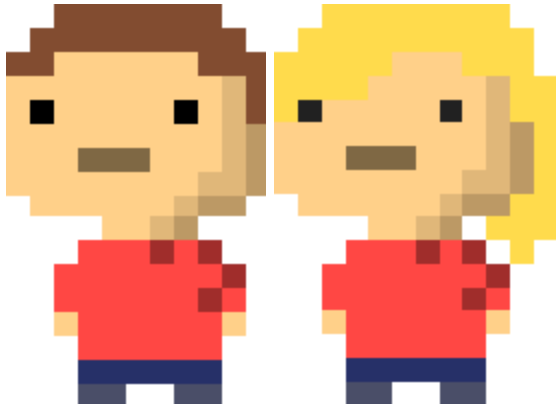


The simple design is also very appropriate for the mobile market as it's a style that is commonly used there and allows for the game to be easy to look at and not daunting. This is also extended into the UI. The colour palate will be a colourful pastel shaded tones.



A sample of the different pastel colours that will be used

The Character of the game have been designed to look cute and simple whilst maintaining the pixel art style of the game. Below is the base sprite for each of the characters features will be changeable at character creation.



4.6 Audio Design

The audio for the game will be different depending on what the player is doing in the office an ambient chiptune style song will play quietly in the background. If the player is at an event the background ambience will be the noise of the crowd. The mini games will have there own soundtrack sorted by the genre of the game this music will be retro style consisting of bleeps and bloops of early games like Space Invaders. Every time the player interacts with something a confirmer bleep will happen to provide some feedback to make the game feel more “juicy” another thing done to allow the game to be more perceived as juicy is NPC’s will blabble nonsense sounds to give them personality’s. These sounds will be similar to the made up language found in The Sims (Maxis, 2000) and the noises the animals make in Animal Crossing (Nintendo, 2001). This will also help the goal of making the player feel attached to the NPC’s that our friendly to them.

4.7 Prototype

To see if the game was feasible a prototype with placeholder art and basic implantation of features has been made.

Player Office



In the above screen shot the player is situated at the start of the game in their own office. The UI shows the amount of money the player currently has which will display minus numbers if they are in debt. The total amount of page views they have received this month and the Date used to

keep track of time and progression in the game. In the office the player can walk around and in the screenshot the computer has an exclamation mark above it to denote they player has unread emails.



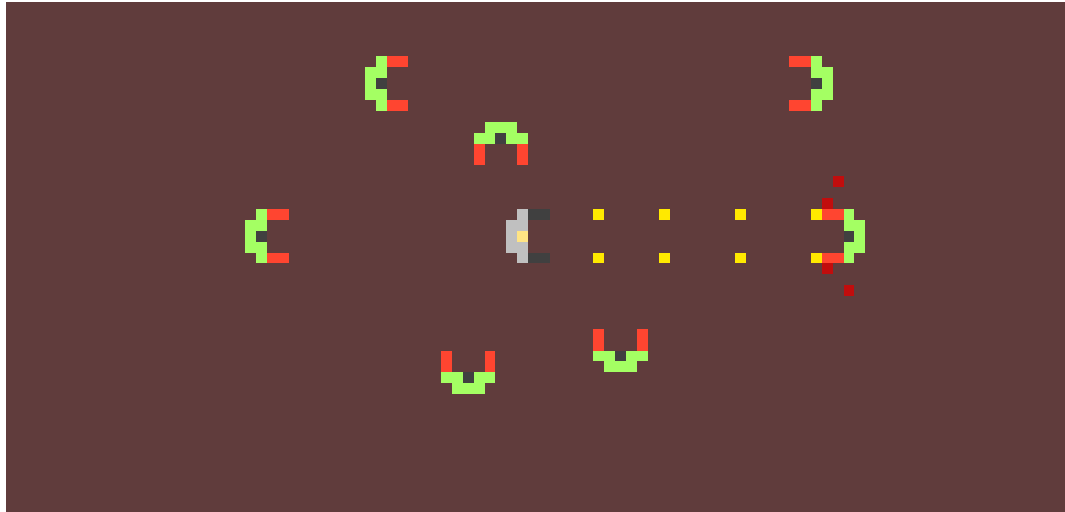
The player is free to click/touch any of the options which will display the corresponding UI. Because the player currently has unread email it flashes to make them aware of that.

Review Choice



Here the player has chosen to do a review so a list of available games appears. As the player has only just started and this is a prototype only 1 game has been added to it. In the final version would also need to display release dates as well but was beyond the scope of the prototype.

"WAR" Game



The “WAR” game is based on the Defensive genre, this is the only game available in the prototype. It’s meant to very simple the player can turn the character around 360 degrees using the mouse and it fires automatically the game is complete when all the enemies are dead

Review Interface



Review Comments



Shown above after posting a review the user will receive comments that scroll up the screen and there page view will increase as the get them. The player's corruption in this screen is quite high which is why they are receiving negative comments.

Optional features based on time constraints

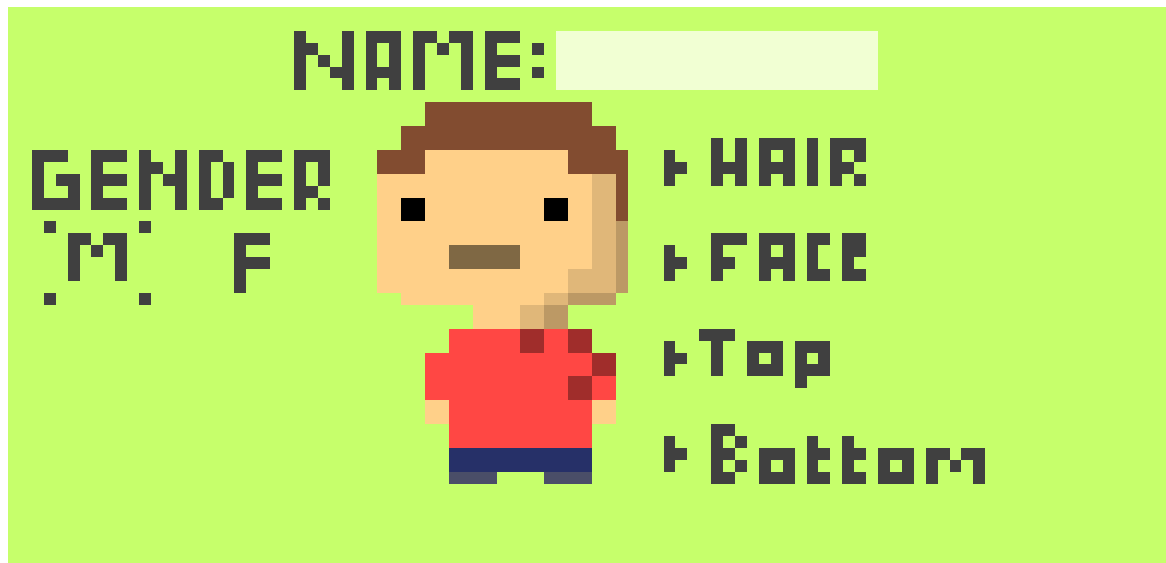
Press Events

Occasionally the player will be invited via the in game email or from NPCs coming into the office of various press events these can include things like announcements of new consoles or games. Depending on the type of event they player will be sent to a different place. If the player is giving games bad review scores or posting news stories that publishers have asked not to be released then that will decrease the players chance of being invited to conferences & events.

Company Press Conference – The player will be sat down in a room of journalists facing towards the stage and news will be announced on the stage in front of them as the news is announced a mini game will take place where the player must type up the news on the laptop as quick as possible to get news onto their site before anyone else which will net more views then posting the content slowly. The player will not be able to move around this space and will be in a fixed location.

Trade Show – If the player is invited to attend a trade show they will have to pay for the ticket and travel to get to the show which will come out of the player's bank. Once the player is at the event they will be able to walk around the floor of the shoe and visits developers booths where they can then preview whatever games are on show which will start the Preview mini game. There will be a page view bonus applied to any games covered at the show. Shows last for 7-8 hours of in game time which ticks down gradually any Preview that the player does whilst at the show will subtract 2 hours from the even allow them to only do a 2-3 Previews per show.

Character Creation



Character Creation

As mentioned in 4.2 the game will feature a character creation at the start of the game to allow the player to feel like they have a presence in the world as this has shown to increase how they relate to the character. The player will have several options including gender, and then hair and face styles and then the clothes colour. The screen below shows the layout of the character creation.