



Haute école d'ingénierie et d'architecture Fribourg  
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# Game Design & Development

## Lessons from the industry

# Contents

- Your team
- Technology
- Client
- Pitch
- Profit
- Your studio
- The Swiss scene

# Your team

The designer usually works with a **team**



# The team

- Today, enormous diversity of skills required
  - Artistic, technical, design, business
- The secret to successful teamwork is **love**
- Love problems
  1. Members incapable of loving any game
  2. Members in love with a different game than the one they are making
  3. Members in love with different visions of the same game

# When you do not love the game

- Mediocre game at the best
- Try to find aspects that you can love (interface, mechanics)
- If you can't love the game, love the audience.
  - Imagine that you are offering a special gift
- Otherwise, pretend to love the game!

# Designing together

- Everybody has opinions
- Ignoring the team implies catastrophic consequences
- Include the team whenever possible in the design
  - More ideas to choose from
  - Weed out flawed ideas quickly
  - View the game from many perspectives
  - Make everyone feel involved and responsible

# The core design team

- Do not involve everyone in the design all the time
- Compose a core design team
  - Interested and productive persons during meetings
- After taking a decision with the core design team, inform the rest of the team
- Typical process
  1. Initial brainstorming - all the team
  2. Independent design - core design team members
  3. Design discussion - core design team
  4. Design presentation - core design team to the whole team

# Team communication key issues

- Objectivity
  - The most likely to go wrong 😊
  - Do not impose your ideas
  - Ask and let the team discuss
- Clarity
- Persistence
  - Write things down!
- Comfort
- Respect
- Trust
- Honesty
- Privacy
- Unity





# The technology

The team  
builds a game  
with  
**technology**



# Technology

- The most dynamic element of the tetrad
  - Volatile, rapid advancements, unpredictable
- Medium of the game
  - Computer and electronics
  - Paper, tokens, dice, etc.
- Some innovations imply new kinds of games
  - Players want innovation
  - Last decade: “adolescence” of the domain?

# Foundational vs. decorative

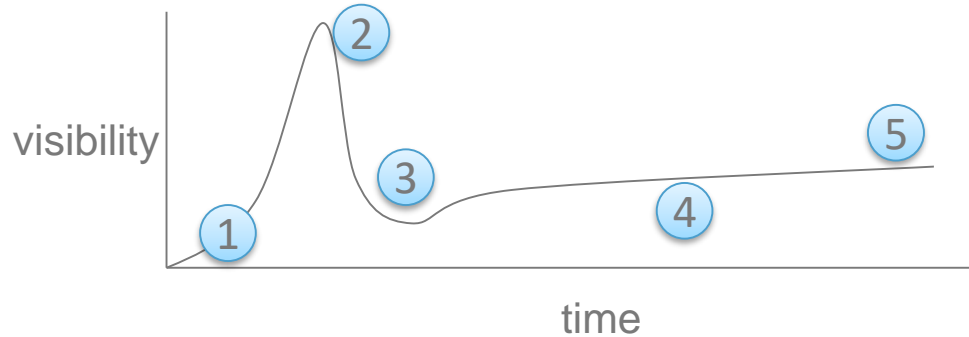
- **Foundational** technologies
  - Make a new kind of experience possible
- **Decorational** technologies
  - Make existing experiences better



# Example of technologies

- Sonic the hedgehog
  - Foundational: Sega Genesis supported fast scrolling
- Myst
  - Foundational: CD-ROM
  - Decorational: gorgeous 3D graphics
- Ragdoll physics
  - Decorational in FPS
    - Half Life 2, Bulletstorm, etc.
  - Foundational in ICO

# The Hype Cycle



Model created by Gartner Research

1. Technology trigger: discovery or announcement
2. Peak of inflated expectations
3. Trough of disillusionment
4. Slope of enlightenment
5. Plateau of productivity

# Design and the Hype Cycle

- The Hype Cycle happens **every time**
- Designers need to know about it for
  1. **Immunity**: do not risk on technologies you haven't see work
  2. **Inoculation**: someone in your team wants to integrate in the game a new crazy technology. Make him understand the Hype Cycle!
  3. **Fundraising**: investors are sometimes charmed by inflated expectations. Get the money before the trough of disillusionment!

# The innovator's dilemma

- Innovator's dilemma, Clayton Christensen
- Companies fail because they listen their customer
  - Situation where a new technology has appeared, but for clients it isn't good enough to replace the old one
  - The company decides to focus on the old one
    - Sustaining technology
  - Suddenly, the new technology is good enough and all customers of the old one jump ship for it
    - Disruptive technology
- Famous examples
  - Consoles
  - Motion controllers (WII)

# The progress

- The speed of technological progress is accelerating
  - More difficult to predict the future
  - Boston Dynamics
- Singularity: the moment where technological progress is too fast to make predictions
- Do not try to understand only current technologies, but think about what is coming next
  - E.g. predict trends on 1,3,5 or 2,4,10 years



# The Client

Hopefully, your  
game will have  
**clients**



# Clients

- Who?
  - Game publishers
  - Media companies holding popular franchises
  - Someone without entertainment experience
  - (Communities of gamers)
- Clients probably pay you to make the game
  - They have strong opinions about your game
  - You need the ability to find compromises

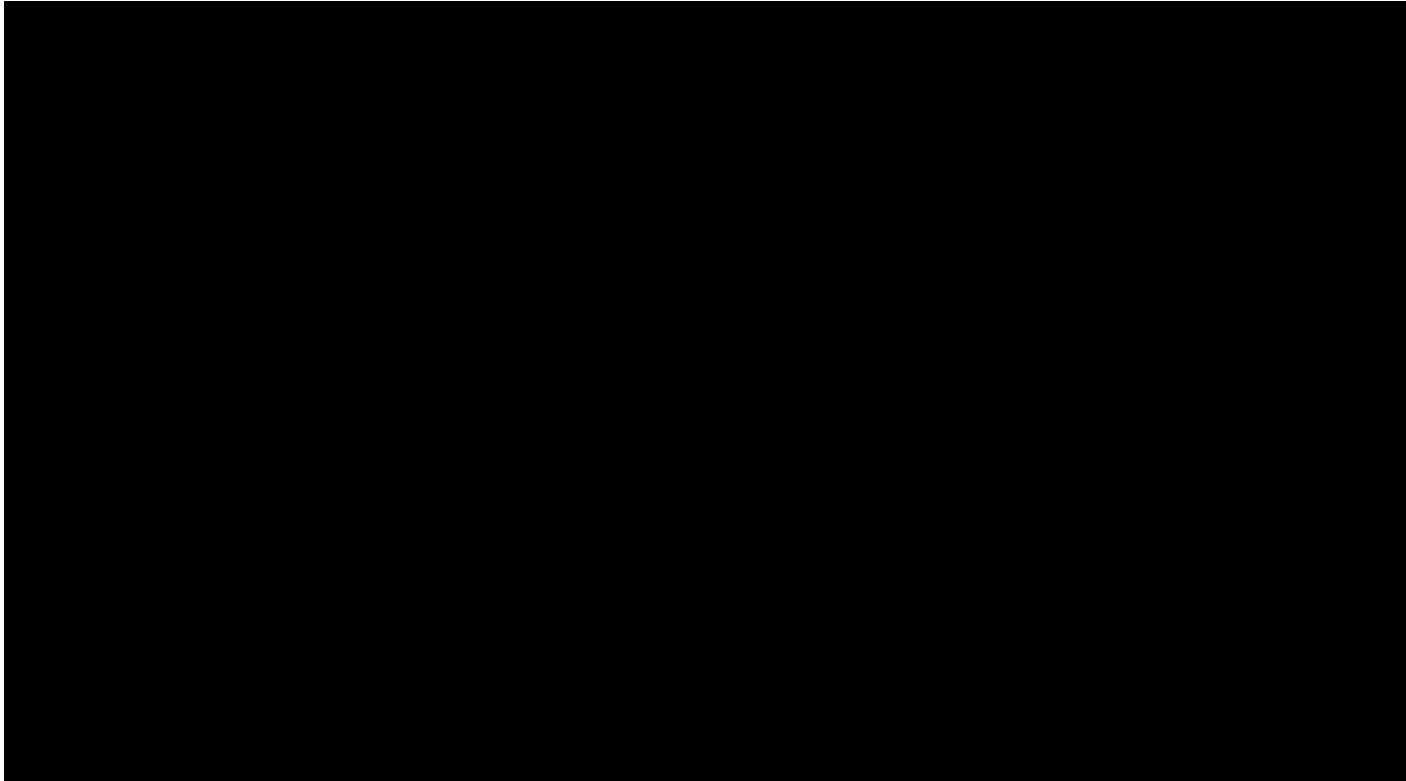
# Client's bad suggestions

- There are 3 ways to deal with bad suggestions
  - Agree to the bad suggestion
  - Tell the client why the suggestion is bad
  - **Try to understand the client**
- Suggestions are solutions to unstated problems
  - If you are able to state the problem, you can find a better solution

# Dealing with clients

- Some clients do not know what they really want
  - Opposite of strong opinions
  - Help them figure out their desires
- Learn about the client, personally and professionally, to understand what they want
- Client have 3 layers of desire
  - Words
  - Mind
  - Heart

# «Walk(-)in Fridge» - Part 1



# «Walk(-)in Fridge» - Part 2



# The pitch

The designer gives  
the client a **pitch**



# Pitching

- Convince people that your game is worth the risk
- You are the best and only person to pitch your game
  - If you don't believe your game is good enough, nobody will believe it
- Who will you pitch to?
  - Team members and potential partners (concept)
  - Management (approval for prototyping)
  - Publisher (try to get development deal)
  - Reporters at game conferences



# Negotiation of power

- Power: the ability to get what you want
- Knowing “what you want” is essential
  - You can focus your effort much more effectively
- Pitching the game is a negotiation of power
  - What you want
  - What clients want
- An idea is not judged on its overall merit, but by how useful it is

# Tips for a successful pitch (1/4)

1. Get in the door
  - Publisher are hard to get an audience with
  - Like the prettiest girls at school, they know it
  - **Use a mutual contact**
    - Participate in industry events to create your network (IGDA, GameCulture)
2. Show you are serious
  - Prepare design documents, talks, prototypes
3. Be organized
  - Test before your PC, prepare handouts

# Tips for a successful pitch (2/4)

4. Be genuinely passionate
  - It's contagious
5. Assume their point of view
  - Listen to them and try to solve their problems
  - Be simple and clear
  - Go straight to the point
  - Use short sentences to wrap up your ideas
6. Design the pitch
  - The pitch is an experience, over-plan it!

# Tips for a successful pitch (3/4)



7. Know all the details
  - Design, schedule, financial, risks
  - Probably, the audience will stop you for questions
8. Exude confidence
  - You are sure the game is perfect for the client
  - “absolutely” sounds much better than “yes” or “probably”
  - Avoid “negative” sentences/opinions
9. Be flexible
  - Be ready to change speech scheduling
  - Richard Garfield (Magic: The Gathering)

# Tips for a successful pitch (4/4)

## 10. Rehearse

- Pitch your game to your family and friends

## 11. Get them to own it

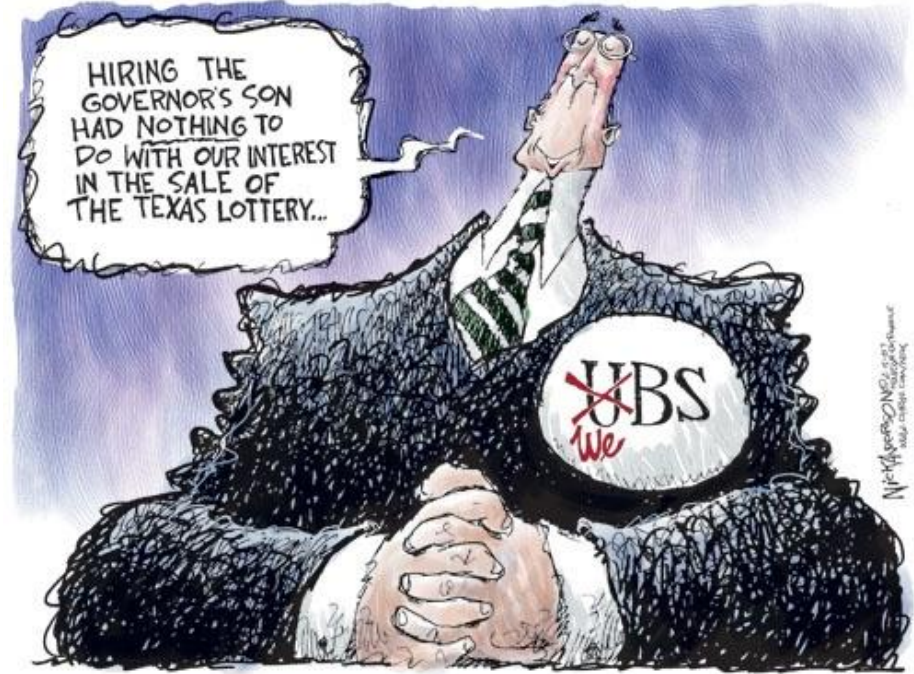
- Have an “advocate” in the audience
- Integrate ideas of the client in the pitch

## 12. Follow up

- If they do not contact you, but they appreciated your pitch, few day after find an excuse to send an email or to call

# Profit

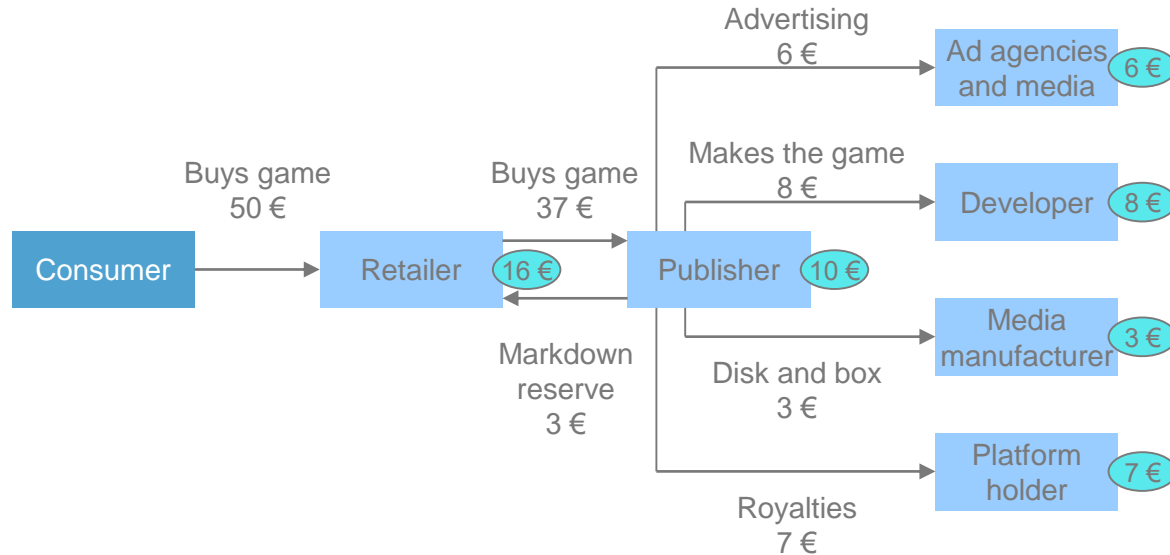
The designer and the client want the game to make a **profit**



# Profit and love

- Designers love creating games
  - In general, they accept to work as “amateur”!
- The industry and investors want money
  - Clients are ready to finance more profitable domains
- “The one with the gold makes the rules”
  - You have to understand enough about the games business
  - Making money can be like a game

# A simple business model



- Reality is more complex!



# Units sold

- Compare your game to others that have come before
- Units sold equals success (or not)
  - A lot of excellent games were unsuccessful (e.g. Clover's games)
- Hard to get these numbers
  - Sometimes published on the Web or in a magazine
  - Easier when you work for a big developer or publisher
  - **SteamSpy**
- Publishers use these data to estimate the potential success of your game
  - Very hard to argue

# Breakeven

- Amount of game units to sell before the publisher makes back invested money
  - Do not forget to calculate this value!

# Some common terminologies

- SKU (Stock Keeping Unit)
  - Unique inventory item for a store
  - A game can have many SKU, one for each language and console
- COGS (Cost of Goods Sold)
  - Cost to make a game unit
- Burn rate
  - Cost of the studio per month
- Sold in vs. Sold through
  - Sold in: retailer buys from the publisher
  - Sold through: players buy
- NPV (net present value)
  - Money in your hand **now** worth more than in your hand in the future
- Christmas
  - 75% of all games in USA sold during that season

# If you create your studio

- How to survive?



# Choose the team

- Only necessary people
  - You are the only one able to sell your game!
- Don't offer parts of your company
- A small team performs better
  - Motivated developers more efficient
- If necessary, pay people
  - Rights, motivation, deadlines

# Finance the game

- Find clients or raise money
  - Publishers
  - Investors, banks, business angels, etc.
  - Often expensive money
  - Pro Helvetia
- Crowdfunding
  - Kickstarter, Indiegogo
- (Greenlight)
- Self-financing
  - Your money
  - Your family and friends
- Provide services
  - Local market easier
- Awards

# Requirements

- Create a first playable prototype
  - Artworks help, but not enough
  - Publishers and people know mechanics
- Organization
  - Planning
  - Requirements (don't forget marketing and beta testing)
  - Possibly a business plan
  - Game documents
  - Know your core team
  - Pitch

# The network

- Talk of your project with experienced (or not) people
- Meet and participate in the developers communities
- Game jams
  - Work also with other teammates
- Fairs and conferences
  - Gamescom (business area), GDC, but also local events



# The players

- Indie games well accepted
- Show prototypes
- Create a community
  - Expectations
  - Playtesting
  - “Make people part of the team”
  - Donations and crowdfunding

# Strategies

- A lot of competitors
  - Having a good game is not enough
- Study the stories of other games
  - Sometimes impossible to replicate a model
- Some ideas of strategies (not exclusive):
  - Raise money, develop the game, propose it on the market
  - Create a free game, use a model based on micro transactions or advertising
  - Propose an advanced prototype, create a community, finalize the game by adding your financial model
  - Identify a single local market (e.g. education) and develop the game for a customer
  - ...

# Niche – Philomena Schwab

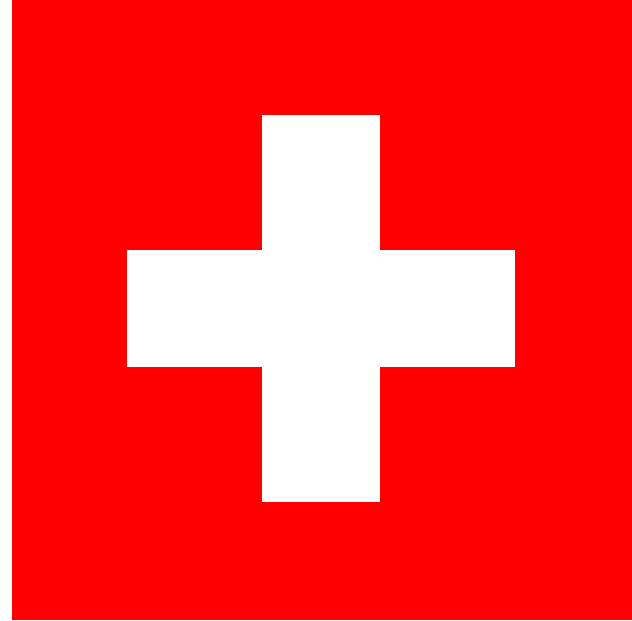


# Don't Kill Her – Osef Wuthrer



# The Swiss Scene

- You're lucky...  
Today it exists!



# Communities

- Pro Helvetia
  - Game Culture program
  - Financing (awards)
- Meetup
  - Lausanne (and now Geneva/Bern), first Wednesday of the month
- SGDA (Swiss Game Developer Association)
  - Community
  - Events
  - Access to the GDC and the Gamescom



# Swiss Game Center

- Main axes:
  - Support for startups
  - Education and Research
  - Events (Swiss Game Academy and others)
  - **Master classes:**
    - TotalGameDEV
    - James Schall conference
- [org@gameacademy.ch](mailto:org@gameacademy.ch)



Swiss **Game Center**  
more than interaction

# Swiss Game Academy

