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Software Engineering

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Biography: Gabe Newell

Within the expansive world of video games, Gabe Newell is a legend. In 1983 at the age of 21 he dropped out of Harvard University to pursue a career at Microsoft. While at Microsoft he didn’t focus at all on video games, which weren’t particularly popular or advanced at the time, but rather he worked on the Windows 1.0 operating system. He was a producer on the Windows 1.01, 1.02, and 1.03 OS’. After a fellow employee left Microsoft and created the famous and ground-breaking shooting game ‘Quake’, Gabe was inspired by the potential of this new art form and quit Microsoft. He dragged along a fellow employee Mike Harrington and founded ‘Valve’ in 1996. In the following years, Gabe Newell and his company Valve not only revolutionised the world of video games, but also of video game creation and retailing.

Valve’s influence on multiple video game genres has been immense. A total of 7 of their games are listed on Wikipedia among the best games of all time. Valve’s creations include ‘Half Life’, ‘Counter Strike’, ‘Team Fortress’, ‘Dota’, and ‘Portal’. Half Life was an action adventure shooting game. Much of the code for the game’s engine was from the aforementioned game ‘Quake’, and, similar to Quake, it was one of the first first-person shooting games of all time. As of 2008 it was the bestselling game of that genre in history with 9.3 million sales. Their later title Counter Strike was a modification of this game created by some independent developers. Valve quickly hired them, and turned Counter Strike into a massive franchise. The most recent iteration of the franchise, ‘Counter Strike: Global Offensive’, is one of the biggest competitive gaming titles around. Teams from all over the world compete within the game to win a prize of $1,000,000. Furthermore, there is a significant betting community based around the games, with millions of dollars in circulation. These games changed the direction of future games and gave rise to Valve’s divine status in the eyes of many nerds and software developers. Admittedly, Gabe Newell probably wouldn’t be considered a software engineer primarily anymore, seeing as he’s moved on to management and such, but his early role as a game designer and software engineer helped shape the future of the video game industry.

However, these immensely profitable games weren’t the pinnacle of Valve’s success. Valve’s genius was its ability to not only create video games, but to facilitate the creation of other games for independent developers. They created the video game platform Steam, which serves as an online retailer for games made by any developer that has the desire to upload their games to Steam. Video game developers upload their games to Steam which allows users to download them and share content with their other friends on Steam. The platform also provides users with features like top sellers of the week and best indie game of the week. Gamers are then exposed to new kinds of content that they can easily share with their fellow internet compatriots. Developers benefit from far greater exposure than they could ever expect to get while independently marketing their product. Steam has over 100 million active users; if that isn’t a testament to the efficacy of Valve’s software there can be no other. In addition, Valve provides lots of services to developers, including releasing the physics engines for their games for developers to use and copy. This has led to spin off series like Counter Strike and Gary’s Mod becoming enormously popular. Valve’s visionary development of Steam has allowed them to eclipse video game development and compete with the likes of Microsoft and Sony with their consoles.

In conclusion, Gabe Newell started as an ordinary developer grinding away at Microsoft, and ended up as the founder of one of the most revolutionary software developers in the world. His current net worth stands at 5.5 billion dollars. He’s revered by the gaming community who affectionately know him as ‘Gaben,’ and there is no end in sight to the success of his company. Gaben’s success lies in his ability to identify new trends and the revolutionary inclusivity of his projects.