What Does it Mean to Play Online

Lesson I02

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Question: What is this "online mode"?

For many of you, it is just "*the bunch of additional funcionalities*" you can use when your PC/console is connected to the network

Yes and no ... Because not all functionalities are the same!

Bad News

Playing online is NOT the same as "playing together"

NOPE!

You do not need to be online to play with someone

RE-NOPE!

Having a network in the middle is just another way to share resources

A LAN party is not so much different from screen sharing (from a technical standpoint)

What is the Point, Then?

- This is not a matter of playing online, it is a matter of being online!
- It is about the whole playing experience
  I.e., to use the network to ignite and amplify the player experience and involvement

  - Global scoreboards (presence)
  - Trophies (reputation)
    - In-game
    - Out-of-game
  - Social networking (community!)

These are "experience providers"

- These are about the online experience (and part of your game)
  … But they are not "game"

- And all this, to let you brag around about your new hi score!
- Well established companies are there to help you to do just this

The Dawn of Online Games

- Yesterday: we used to buy boxes from a shelf
  Inside the box. A media was holding everything needed to let me play (all my experience)

Bad news: those days are gone!

- Today: we download a software (sometimes for free) and then pay for an online service

Focus on the Single Words

- Download
  - A change in the distribution model
  - More affordable for newcomers
  - Cheaper
  - Unlimited copies always available
    - How many user will you expect on day zero? Will your system hold?

- For free
  - A HUGE change in the business model
  - A different way to market your work
  - You must find different ways to get money from your work
    - Always remember: no longer a good but a service

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Focus on the Single Words

- Pay
  - "You don't pay, you don't play"
  - In-game payment and DLC are a must today
  - You must make users pay
    - You need a broker or at least a bank
    - Are you managing sensible data?
      (mind the DGPR !!!!)
  - Simply put, you cannot breakeven with just the sales … not with a AAA game

- Online service
  - A game is no longer (only) a software
  - The online service you provide is an integral part of your product
    - When you shutdown the server the game is useless
      - Or crippled, at best
  - You do not distribute it, you RUN it!

About "How to get Money from the Users"

1. You are too greedy →
   you sell too many copies →
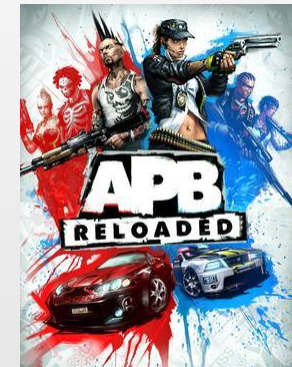   you have too many users →
   your system is busted

2. You are too greedy →
   your users get upset →
   your game is deserted

3. You are too temperate →
   You do not get enough users (or money) →
   Your business is busted

Any MMO and MOBA can fit here

Way too greedy

To Summarize ...

- We must look to the "online thing" as a component of our game
  - I did not say "resource"
  - I did not say "feature"
  - I implied the word "strategic"

- Online will be a non-optional part of your game and you must design your game around it
  - Do not use it occasionally (as a resource on demand)
  - Do not consider it optional (as an optional feature)
  - The way you will use the online component might determine success and failure of your game

- This is everything about understanding if online is in or out of your core business
  1. How deeply it integrates with your game
  2. **How it relates with game mechanics**

"Bad" Example

What do We Use it For?

Online as an added value
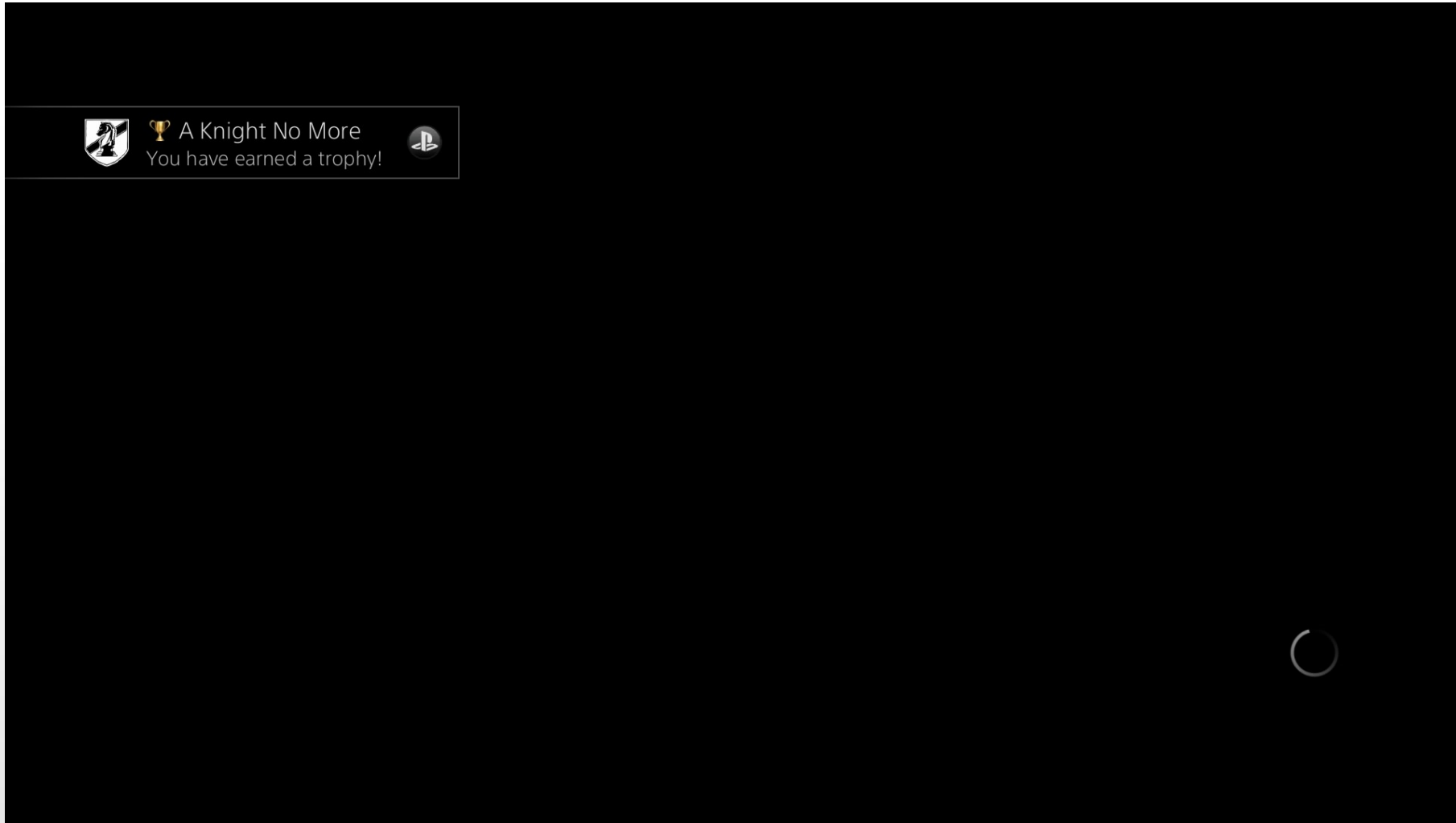
Online as an option

Online as a feature

To Summarize ...

- An option
  - You design the game to be played offline but it can be also played online
  - You design the game to be played both online and offline

- A feature
  - You design the game to be played online, if needed it can be played also offline (but it usually sucks)
  - You design the game to the played online only

- An added value
  - You design the game to leverage on other online services
  - You can have added value on top of both "option" and "feature"

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The Turning Point

Another Perspective

The "added value infrastructure" can also be seen as a middleware wrapping our game and acting as a bridge toward the outside
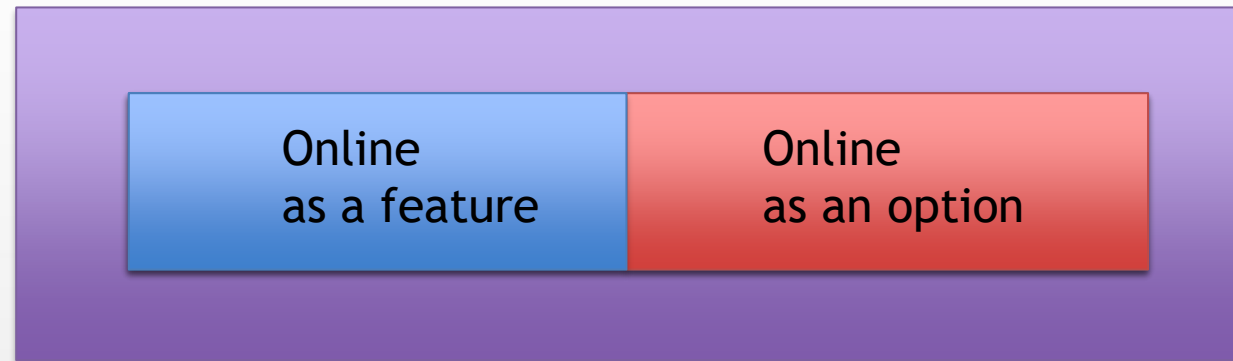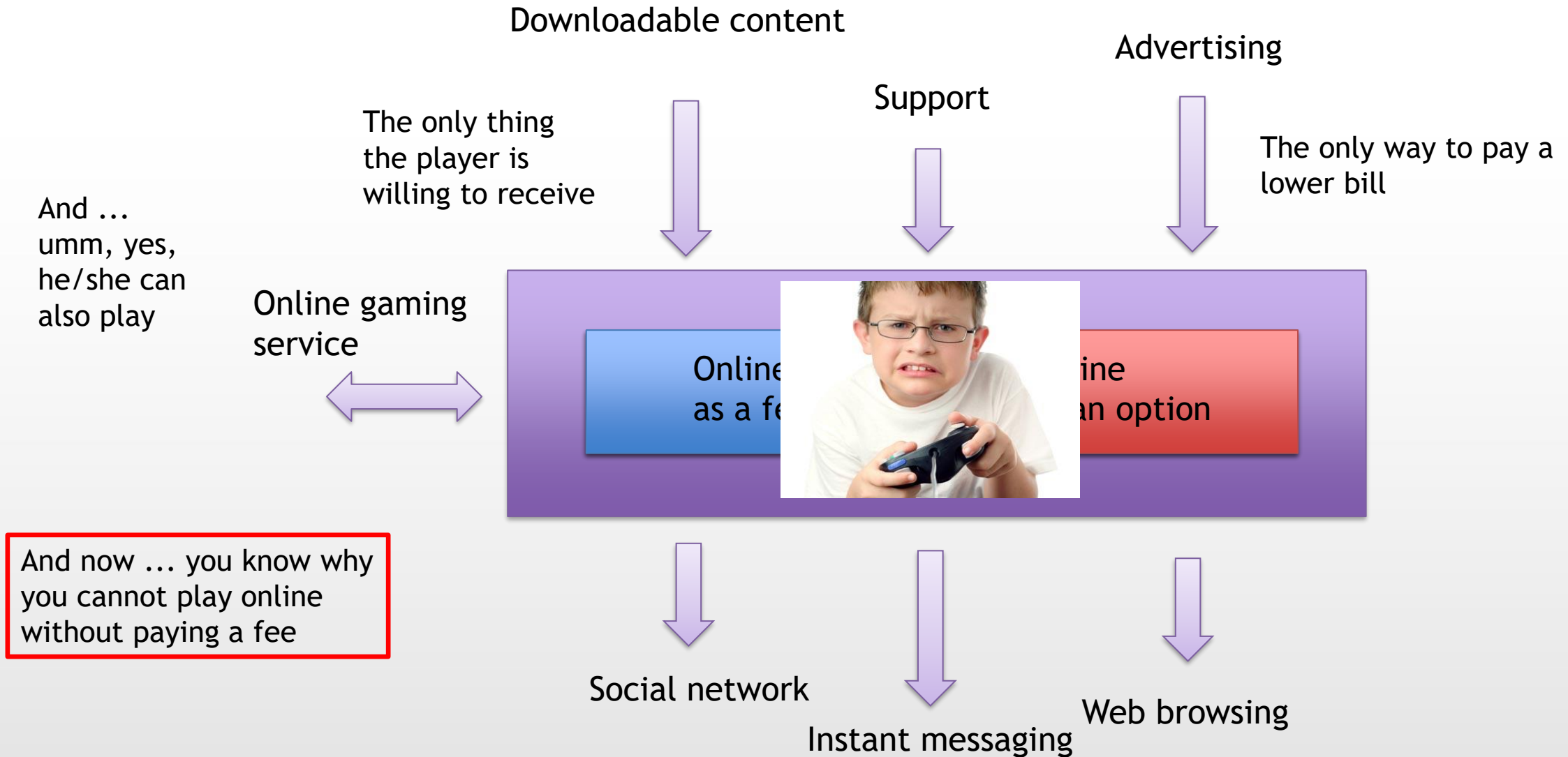

- PRO: Our game will be protected
  - We do not need to care about what is outside
- CONS: Our game will be constrained
  - We cannot do anything without the infrastructure permission

Another Perspective

Online ~~~~~~~~~~ ine
as a fe~~~~~~~~ an option
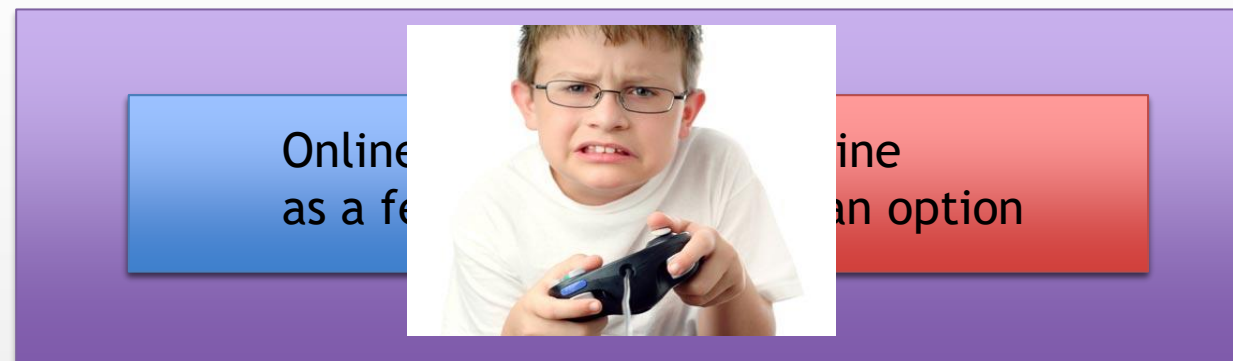
The player sitting in the center never asked to be "protected" from the outside … in any way!

Another Perspective

Downloadable content

Advertising

Support

The only thing the player is willing to receive

The only way to pay a lower bill

And … umm, yes, he/she can also play

Online gaming service

Online ... as a fe... ...ne ...an option

And now … you know why you cannot play online without paying a fee

Social network

Instant messaging

Web browsing

It's a SERVICE !

- Under this prospective online gaming is no longer a software product, it's a service

- You are not just required to BUILD it
  you have to RUN it!

- Taken from "laws of online world design"

Is it a game?

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!

More Than a TelCo (Service)

- TelCos, like game providers
  - Manage HUGE servers
  - Provide 7/24 assistance
  - Must prevent frauds
  - Host services from third parties

- TelCos, unlike game providers
  - Do not produce software
  - Do not produce content
  - Do not need a community, just data flows
  - Can assume all customer are overage
  - Know customer is the same as the payee

More Details About What We Must Do

- They do not produce software
  - You must provide and manage your software (both client and server side)
  - And the software MUST be very secure

- They do not produce content
  - You must provide game and DLC code and assets

- They do not need a community, just data flows
  - If you have no community, the game will never grip
  - You will have to pay at the very least an extra salary for a community manager

- They can assume all customer are overage
  - Your user base might be underage
  - Dealing with kids - and their data - is NEVER easy today (DGPR)
  - Child safety online is a MAYOR issue and an ENORMOUS responsibility

- They know customer is the same as the payee
  - In some cases, dad/mom is going to pay
  - Customer is always right … But who is "more right" if they have different requests?

References

- Some Current Game Economics
  online at https://www.raphkoster.com/2017/11/27/some-current-game-economics/
  by Raph Koster
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