

Ubisoft Research Doc (Script)

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Sham:

Ubisoft. One of the biggest names in the gaming industry and a titan in terms of pushing game design to new heights. But they weren't always this way. In fact, some could say they started off as french farmers who imported computers from the UK and resold them. That's because-they-that's what they did.

[stuttery, tight camera angle on face]

So, let's take a deep dive into who Ubisoft are, and how they got to become what we know them as today.

[Musical element - Funny Thing - Thundercat]

[Pan out using the greenscreen. Background image needs work]

[15-20 seconds. Start later on in the song so the chorus hits]

Sham:

In a small french farm in 1980, 5 brothers wanted to branch out of the family and created a business under the name of "Guillemot International" and began importing software from the UK, realising it was half the price than to buy it from France, to sell via a Mail-In service. By 1986, "Ubi Soft." was founded, allowing the Guillemot family to delve into their own production of video games. The name is short for "Ubiquitous Software".

[include a graphic in the edit to illustrate how Ubi Soft is short for Ubiquitous Software]

Lyla (offscreen):

or it comes from the french phrase "d'Union des Bretons indépendants".

[Lyla and Sham have an improvised and forth about which one is real]

Sham:

Over the next few years, business had begun to boom, with Ubi Soft now wanting to develop their own games. So they began to

hire programmers, and what better way to entice a bunch of computer nerds than a luxury chateau in Brittany, France. A wonderful coastal peninsula complete with beach resorts and all the hills you can shake a profitable software distribution company at. The Chateau strategy worked! And soon UbiSoft had their first team of 18 and 19-year-old computer programmers to make games.

As a quick aside, can we discuss how they talked about the chateau in retrospect? The Executive Director of WorldWide Studios, Christine Burgess-Quemard was quoted as saying "we also thought it would be great to have a place where we could actually lock all of our developers together." and explained their "first aim was to make sure that everybody was under the same roof so we could have everybody contained.".

[genuine response to these quotes, most likely about how sketchy this sounds and some kind of reference to recent allegations.]

[Lyla steps in with a script prop (paper?) and we improvise about sticking to the script - keep it light early]

Sham:

They started work on their first game - Zombi. It was successful, selling 5,000 copies, being originally released for the Amstrad CPC in 1989. Since UbiSoft was developing for relatively new hardware, with the Amstrad CPC 464 launching in 1984, they were able to impress with the game's strong atmosphere, which was noted in reviews. Something that had begun to set the company apart from the crowd was their emphasis on developing the same software for multiple platforms. For Example, Zombi was ported to the Amiga, Atari ST, Commodore 64, MS-DOS and the ZX Spectrum.

In spite of this, the costs of maintaining the chateau grew to be too much, forcing Ubi Soft to move into a more traditional office space in Paris. This is when they started production of their smash hit franchise *Rayman*. The project was a massive undertaking for the company, and took a lot of time and money, as well as three platform changes, for the developers to be able to produce it. The original plan was to release for the "Super Nintendo CD System" but that never released. Instead, they aimed for the Atari Jaguar, before quickly dodging a

bullet and settling on the Sony PlayStation. Before long the project went from having a measly 2 developers working on it at any given time to over 100. Which, for France, was practically unheard of at the time. The game was released and became a smash hit.

Weighing in at the 13th largest video game publisher by revenue, Ubisoft has had a successful history, with many of their franchises selling tens of millions of copies. In spite of this, Ubisoft has been lacking behind some of its major competitors over the last 5 years. It's seen slower growth when compared with Take-Two interactive in spite of the higher gross revenue and has managed to close the gap it has on EA and Activision Blizzard. It's unclear which company will win out in terms of revenue and brand recognition, but for now, Ubisoft has cemented itself as one of the great names of video games.

Now, we can't talk about Ubisoft's success in the games market without mentioning their Tom Clancy franchise. You may know the name Tom Clancy as that of a famous author, known for writing books like Splinter Cell and Rainbow Six. but, if you're a gamer like me, you'll know the name for being attached to some of the biggest shooter series like Splinter Cell and Rainbow Six.

But what a lot of people don't realise is that the history behind Ubisoft acquiring the name is rather rich. Not long after the release of Clancy's Critically acclaimed book "The Hunt For Red October" Clancy founded his own development studio under the name Red Storm Entertainment. But before this, a programmer named David Smith undertook the creation of a game based on his book "SSN". A 3D submarine-them-up that was released in 1996. Clancy didn't have much experience controlling submarines and asked his good friend and former submarine commander Doug Littlejohns. Doug was quoted as saying that Clancy would never make a "red cent out of this." he sat Clancy down and advised him to create his own studio purely for games and put some money into it. In the fall of the same year, Red Storm was founded.

2 years later they released their first major title: Rainbow Six and it began turning heads for being a drastic change from the standard shooter at the time. While most games were fast-

paced and relied on quick reflexes like Quake, Rainbow Six focused more on being slow and methodical. The success led to sequels and a sister franchise under the name "Ghost Recon" as well as Ubisoft's attention who sought to buy the studio. In 2000 Red Storm officially changed hands, alongside Clancy's name to Ubisoft. The name and the games attached to it have gone on to be some of the biggest in the industry.

[Ubisoft Franchises: read em quickfire]

Sham:

- Anno
- Assassin's Creed
- Brothers in Arms
- The Crew
- CSI
- Driver
- Far Cry
- Imagine
- Just Dance
- Might and Magic
- Myst
- Petz
- Prince of Persia
- Rayman
 - Raving Rabbids
- Red Steel
- The Settlers
- Silent Hunter
- Tom Clancy's
 - Ghost Recon
 - Rainbow Six
 - Splinter Cell
- Watch Dogs

[Timeline graphic of engine releases along with their first games, quick-fire format for this]

NOTES DO NOT READ THIS

CryEngine, Far Cry 2004

Scimitar, Assassin's Creed 2007

Dunia, Far Cry 2 2008

Anvil, Assassin's Creed 2 2009

UbiArt Framework, Rayman Origins 2011

AnvilNext, Assassin's Creed 3 2012

Disrupt, Watch_Dogs 2014
AnvilNext 2.0, Assassin's Creed Unity 2014
Snowdrop, The Division 2016

As for their game engines, Ubisoft's history starts in 2004, with the release of Far Cry. While the game was developed by CryTek, it was published by Ubisoft. The game was developed on the proprietary engine called CryEngine, which was later used by CryEngine for their own games. This engine was adapted into the Dunia engine for Far Cry 2 in 2008, now fully developed in-house by Ubisoft Montreal.

Alongside development of the Dunia engine, the Scimitar engine was released alongside Assassin's Creed in 2007 but was quickly updated and renamed to become Anvil for the 2009 release of Assassin's Creed 2. Following this, it was renamed to AnvilNext with Assassin's Creed 3 in 2012, and further iterated upon to become AnvilNext 2.0 with Assassin's Creed Unity in 2014.

The three outliers are the UbiArt framework, released alongside Rayman Origins in 2011, a 2.5D engine that works best with vector art, matching the style of Rayman Origins. Disrupt, which is the engine that Watch_Dogs used when it was released in 2014. Finally, there's the Snowdrop engine, used by The Division, first released in 2016.

Sham:

As Ubisoft developed as a company, it began to explore new methods of monetisation and audience retention. For this reason, Uplay was created in 2009, launching alongside Assassin's Creed 2. This software allows users to buy games, track progress and earn rewards. With the giant name of Steam being in the market since the early years of 2003, Uplay opted to work alongside it rather than directly compete with it, with games releasing on Steam with integration with Uplay. In recent years, however, Ubisoft has opted to launch games on Uplay and Epic Games Store instead, citing the 30% cut that Valve takes. Uplay drew criticism early on into its life due to its need to always be online, meaning that players could lose progress if they lost connection to the servers. In 2010, this changed to a single check for connection when the game started.

Uplay+ was a later addition to the service, allowing players unlimited access to over 100 games for the price of \$14.99, or £13 a month. This was announced at E3 2019 and implemented on September 3rd of the same year. Since then, Uplay has been replaced with Ubisoft Connect, with Uplay+ morphing into Ubisoft+. Ubisoft+ is criticised for being too expensive for what it offers.

Earlier, we mentioned Steam. Since it holds such a massive place in the industry, it feels amiss to not elaborate further on what the service provides. Valve founded the service in 2003 to make buying and distributing online games much easier. This was a massive shift in the landscape, although it didn't start this way. It was first announced at the Games Developer Conference in 2002 as a simple way to distribute games and release updates and patches for them.

And when it launched a year later, it did exactly that. But that's not to say people were happy with the service. At the time, a lot of people, even some of Valves biggest fans were not happy with their idea of implementing online authentication and DRM.

See, games sold on steam used what's called Digital Rights Management to ensure that people had bought the games they're trying to play. Which seems like a perfectly fine stance to take. However, Steam was a buggy mess, often crumbling under its own weight and crashing the game you were playing with it. Not to mention that the offline mode was a rather cumbersome experience and the UI wasn't particularly fun to look at.

But, unlike a carton of milk, Steam has aged fairly well. As of 2020, the service has had a *lot* of its major issues fixed. Naturally, a service like this has gone on to be *wildly* profitable. In 2017 Steam generated 4.3 *billion* dollars in video game sales. So if you assumed other game studios want a piece of this, both literal and mathematical pie, you would be correct.

[visual gag of a pie chart being a real pie]

["speaking of statistics...did you know that 25% of Ubisoft employees said they had experienced some form of harassment or misconduct at work?" this leads into another off script

ramble]

In recent years some competitors have cropped up, trying to replicate the success of Steam to varying degrees of success. EA launched their 'EA Origin' marketplace in 2011 to support their games and recently Epic launched the Epic Store to directly compete with Steam by giving developers a bigger cut of the profits.

Ubisoft has also thrown their proverbial hat into this ring by launching their service Uplay+ in 2009 alongside Assassin's Creed 2. Originally it was to give players rewards for completing in-game achievements but it evolved into a full marketplace where players can buy games and talk to their friends. It has recently been rebranded to Ubisoft Connect and provides players access to their aforementioned Subscription Service.

Although common in many industries, Ubisoft has had a fair number of allegations made along the lines of sexual harassment, abuse, racism, and other misconduct. Just this year, allegations outlining these topics have been made against Ubisoft, coming from many current and former Ubisoft developers. The controversy grew as the company initially decided against addressing these issues, alongside increasingly aggravating reports, including one from an anonymous individual, stating that they were 'encouraged by HR to "talk it out" with [their] harasser'. One of the biggest names in the allegations was the Creative Director of the upcoming title Assassins Creed Valhalla, Ashraf Ismail. He was internally investigated and fired from the company soon after.

The current CEO of Ubisoft, Yves Guillemot, released a video statement commenting on the overall culture and, more specifically, the sexual harassment accusations that were being made within Ubisoft, with many high-level employees being sanctioned or fired due to these actions.

It's unclear whether or not Yves Guillemot knew about what these allegations were describing before they were made public

[sham goes off topic talking about abuse allegations]

[box thrown at sham's head :)]