GAMBIT Focus Testing

Added by Richard Eberhardt, last edited by Sara Verrilli on Jul 05, 2011 12:54

Focus Testing Basics

Video presentation

Key Points:

Choosing focus testers; what to know before you start testing; advertising; what do your testers need to know before they start playing; observing testers and gathering data; treating your testers with respect (remember the Testing on Human Subjects Protocol reading and quizzes?); What do you do with the data; Quick Checklist of Things to Do and Have.

Choosing Focus Testers:

- Know your audience.
- Know what you want to test.

This is most relevant for open house Focus Testing, as where you advertise and who you contact affects what kind of person attends. For in-house testing, you're going to get a fairly homogenous group of players: "people with a high level of experience in video games, with a desire to play them, and with a good knowledge of the current industry": informed, active potential players.

Most of the people in the world **aren't** like that, so you want to keep that in mind for your results.

What kind of people you want as your focus testers depends on what your goal is. If you're trying to create a game that you think only hardcore, serious video game players will play, you're going to want to get people who spend thirty hours a week playing videogames, and the other ninety hours a week thinking about them.

If you're making a game targeted at ten year olds, you'd better get some ten year olds in to test it, because it doesn't matter how much college students like it; that's not your target audience.

On the other hand, if you're trying to create a game that appeals to a broader section of people, you want a broader selection - folks who play games a lot, occasional players,

Links

GumBeat Spring09 FocusTestQuestionnaire.doc
Molasses Level Survey.doc
Molasses Controls.pdf

people who usually sit and watch someone else play, but can be tempted into playing 'just one game.' They are harder to find, but that makes their feedback more valuable - because they are less informed on how to play video games, and less skilled, they represent a ' casual player' better - because they ARE. They often have more problems with the UI, or understanding instructions, or slower reactions so the games are just too hard for them - and for a potential 'casual' game, that information is really important.

Advertising for Focus Testers.

- Advertise to your audience in advance.
- Choose the appropriate channel.
- Give them a reason to come.

Your target focus tester isn't going to walk in the door just because you need them. So, you need to think about where they are likely to hang out, and what communication method will work to get them to attend. You also need to give them enough time to make it to your Open House, but not advertise so far in advance that it gets forgotten by the time the actual event rolls around.

Do you want kids? Can you advertise at a Boys and Girls club, or contact a summer school program for a field trip? Do you want casual gamers? How about postering at an Internet café, or a coffee house that offers wireless? Do you want college students? Poster near campus.

People have inertia; by default, they aren't going to come. If you can offer them something -even something as simple as pizza and soda, or cookies - it may increase the likelihood of them appearing. Giving people an email address to RSVP to may also increase response; after all, people who have responded feel a bit of commitment. (Check with the staff before offering anything, to be sure that it can/will be provided.)

If your testers can't come to you, can you take it to them? (If you think you may need to do this, talk to the QA staff ASAP - we may need to update the COUHES protocol to permit this, and that will take at least a week's lead time.)

What do you - and your testers - need to know before you start testing?

- Know your focus test goal.
- Be prepared with questions / surveys for your players.

Well, first you need to know why you are doing focus testing. What are your goals? Overall playability? A specific mechanic implementation? Difficulty? Ability to understand your game? Have a set of goals, and write them down. You'll get the answers to these either through direct observation or directed questions.

Secondly, you need to know what information to share with testers before start playing. Ideally, all you need to do is sit them down with the game, and set them loose. If your team hasn't yet prioritized putting in an instruction page, you could instead create a paper handout that resembles, as closely as possible, your intended instructions. That will allow you to test your instructions, even if they aren't in the game yet.

Next, for each focus tester, you want to know how experienced a player they are, and any other specialized information. (For kids, you might want to know their age; for an educational game, their current experience level in whatever your game is attempting to teach.) Before they sit down to play your game, find out and record on your questionaire:

- How many hours per week do they play games?
- How many different types of games do they play each week?
- Do they frequently play games in this genre (puzzle, adventure, RPG, first person shooter, etc?)
- Have they played this game before, and if so, when?

Observing Testers and Gathering Data

- Have instructions for the game ready.
- Observe without interfering or leading your players.
- Keep surveys short (1 page max)

You should try to keep your focus testing as scientific as possible: while your test is running, you don't want to contaminate the data. In this case, that means avoiding influencing your testers, or ruining your results by giving them outside information.

In practice, this means you need to know exactly what information it is reasonable for an 'average player' to have, and in what format, and to give that, and only that, to your tester. So, if your game is supposed to be downloaded from the Internet, and have all of its instructions in its menu system, you want your testers to receive all of their information from the game - not their observers.

Ideally, you should sit back quietly, watch them play, and take notes; if they ask for more information or 'hints', you should shake your head, and ask them - for the sake of the

testing - to make do with the information available to them. If there is an **unexpected** problem with the game, or testing, then you should intervene. The game crashes, a new mechanic isn't working properly, etc.

After the testing is done, you will probably have a few more questions to ask them; those can either be asked verbally, and the notes written down (if so, have just a few questions); or, you can hand them a questionnaire to fill out. Keep "time spent filling out paperwork" less then "time spent playing the game"; for short games, more than one page of questions is too much.

Treating Testers With Respect

- Don't tell them what to do, ask them what is wrong. Help at your discretion, if necessary.
- If a player gets frustrated, ask why and then ask them if they'd like to stop playing.
- Let players fill out their surveys with some privacy.
- Don't ask personal questions.
- Get parental consent forms from any minors (17 years old or less.)

Your players are helping you make your game better, so treat them well. Be courteous, and make sure that they feel comfortable. They've decided to use some of their time to help you with your work-in-progress, and it is their choice to be here at all times. Remember that your testers may quit testing at any time, and that answering questions is voluntary - they may choose to answer some, all or none of the questions asked of them.

Also, while you should be as much of a 'silent observer' as possible, remember that you are observing a human being. If the tester is clearly getting too frustrated, too annoyed, upset or angry, help! Note that your help was necessary - because no game should make someone that frustrated - but give them a hand when needed.

On the legal side, remember that if you are observing minors, you **must** get their parent or guardian's written permission first.

After Testing: Now What?

- Review your observations and your survey answers.
- Decide how you want to use the results to improve your game.
- Review your survey and focus test goals, so you can improve your process for next time.

Once you've finished the focus test, you should gather up all your notes, and the team, and review the information. Once again, it really helps to have a couple of key questions you are trying to get answered "Is the game too hard?" "Is the UI easy to use?" "Is the game fun?"

By sharing your observations and reviewing the surveys, hopefully you'll get a good feeling for how your game was received, what your players liked and disliked, and what frustrated them or made them happy.

If you don't get data that improves your game, chances are either (.001%) your game is perfect, or (99.99%) you are asking the wrong questions. So, THINK very carefully about WHY you are focus testing, and WHAT you want to get out of it before hand!

Quick Focus Testing Checklist Not intended to cover every situation all the time, but a good first guideline

Pre-Focus Test

1. Decide on the focus test's goal - the best goals are formed as a question that your observation of testers will answer. "Do people enjoy the game?" "Is our UI easy to use?" "Do people understand our life mechanic?"
2. Write down your Key Questions, for everyone on the team to see and agree on.
3. Decide how you are gathering your data.
   a. Create an observer's script: exactly how, and what, to tell your users when they sit down to play the game. For games with a rough (or early) UI, this should include instructions on how to play the game, and warnings about any serious bugs that might interfere with the user's experience
   b. Observer's scripts may also include what to say and do in certain expected but undesirable situations:
      - when the player is frustrated, or clearly doesn't know what to do next
      - if the game crashes, or reaches a clearly 'broken' state such that restarting the game is a good idea
      - Alternatively, if you have a particular question you want asked at a particular time, that should be included in the

observer's scripts as well.

   c. Create an observation notes page: exactly what behaviours/instances you wish your observers to take notes about
- when the player is frustrated.
- when they are particularly pleased
- space to record particularly insightful or useful comments
- interview questions, for after/during the playthrough (if you wish to interview the players aftewards.)

   d. Write up a set of questions (if you want a filled out survey.)

4. Will the testers need any additional information to play your game that isn't included in the game? You may want to write up a simple How To Play guide, if your game isn't advanced enough yet to have necessary instructions embedded in the shell and UI. This can be handed out after the observer's script is read, or posted next to the computer for easy reference.

5. Make sure you have a stable working build, installed and tested on each of the testing machines, that will allow your testers enough functionality to answer your questions.

During the Focus Test

1. Have at least one observer for each station where the game is being played. Observers should take notes, assist with starting and ending the game, provide surveys for filling out afterwards, and answer any questions.

   a. Note that if you are using both surveys and observers' notes pages, you will need to make sure you can tell which set of notes goes with which survey - coding them with simple numbers works best (ie, as I sit down Player 1 to test, I write a 1 in the upper left hand corner of my notes page; later, when I hand the player a survey to fill out, I place a 1 in the upper left hand corner as well, showing those two pages of feedback go together.

2. Ideal observers? Everyone on the team! Designers, programmers and artists all see the game a bit differently, and likewise often focus on different aspects of the game.

3. It's often helpful to have one central person collecting finished surveys, and any notes from the observers that go with the surveys; that way things don't get lost.

4. Don't ignore observations just because they don't match your Questions. Testers will often turn up problems or make observations that never occurred to the team to think about.

After the Focus Test

1. *italic* Remember not all feedback is good or useful feedback! *italic*
2. Review the feedback you get, sorting it into relevant/irrelavant piles, and tabulating whatever quantitative data you have gathered. Having someone compile comments/notes into a reasonable synopsis is often helpful.
3. Review your feedback with the Game Director, PO, and Producer! Some feedback may contradict what your GD/PO wants - if so, they may choose to ignore it, and that is their right and job!
4. You need to have a team meeting to discuss the results, and decide what if anything the team is going to do about it, which means the data needs to be shared with the team for them to review, as well.