Post mortem for Meganoid 2017

Blogs

by Pascal Bestebroer on 04/20/17 10:13:00 am   **Expert Blogger**   **Featured Post**

Welcome to the Meganoid(2017) post-mortem. This post-mortem goes into the details on the Meganoid figures and stats. Without context the stats are pretty much silly numbers, so please make sure to read all of this because there is more to the numbers than you might think.

Who am I

So I'll keep this short, if you want to learn more about who I am, please check out my techblog and website. I've been a full-time (indie) developer since 2004. Mostly known for mobile games, but since 2015 also branching to PC games and even some consoles releases here and there (PS Vita and 3DS). I've never had hit games that made me millions, but I have been doing very decent for many years releasing games that have found a growing fan-base in a niche area. My biggest titles include the Gunslugs and Heroes of Loot series of games and Space Grunts.

What's Meganoid

The original Meganoid was released in 2010 on Android and iOS and was a very hard platformer with short levels that sometimes had you screaming if you didn't manage to reach the finish. For me it was a turning point in my games as I finally decided to just build games like that since those are the games I love the most. Luckily I found a niche that works for me and an audience that has been growing alongside me and my games. It also managed to reach close to a million downloads since.

Meganoid(2017) is a reboot of the franchise lifts a lot on the designs behind Spelunky, while still maintaining the difficulty of the original Meganoid game. I named it a "love child of Spelunky and Meat-boy in space", which is a very clear description of what the game is. It's not extremely original, but I'll get to that later on!

Oh, the game was also created in "just" two months, but I'll also get back to that if you keep reading..

Why Meganoid

So before Meganoid I was working on a game called Ashworld, which is a huge project for a one-man development team (which I am) and it's also an open-world game, a genre that I personally have no experience with because I often quit those games within a few hours of play-time. Simply put: Ashworld is a huge challenge for me, and I have been working on it since June 2016.

Seeing as my games are actually my livelihood, money needs to come in on a semi-frequent basis. My business is still running fairly well, I have a huge back-log of games and they are all still bringing in money on a monthly base, but to keep it all running I do have some rules on how long game-projects can take. Ashworld is breaking those rules due to a challenging development phase where I've been learning open-world design and also searching where the actual fun in the game-design is. So the game isn't done, and still needs a few months of work.

Enter the stage: Meganoid.

In January I decided to just do some prototyping with the hopes that I would end up with something playable that could be extended into a game. For this to work, I needed a clear design idea and direction. A game that I could almost create on automatic-mode.

Short development cycle

This "automatic-mode" does need some nuance here, I wrote a blog about it a few weeks ago and I think it painted a wrong picture. Some comments and replies I got thrown at me were along the line of "a quick money grab". My bad on writing the article and not being clear about things, so here's to rectifying it:

The game was made in "just 2 months; and 13 years of experience".

The key part being those 13 years experience, factual there are a lot more years of experience, but the 13 years is how long I've been doing this commercially. Meganoid at it's core is a platformer with rogue-like mechanics. I've created close to 60 commercial platform games, and I've been doing rogue-like elements in my last 5-6 games. I know what to expect code-wise, and I know how to program those things without having to think about it.

To put it in some more perspective, my game Heroes of Loot 2 is a huge RPG-adventure/twin-stick shooter, and it was made in little over 4 months. So I normally work really fast and very effective.

Now think what you like about the short-development cycle, I don't plan to change your mind about it, but from a business point of view: this made sense and still delivers a quality game.

To have this game make some profit I needed it to take just a couple of months work so it would be easier to recoup on the costs AND make money on the game.

The marketing done

The development-cycle was pretty short, but since I had some interesting stuff pretty early on I actually showed some screenshots and gifs in the first week of development on twitter,facebook,instagram and a couple of forums. Some of this got picked up pretty early by mobile-game sites, and Toucharcade showed the first couple of video's I released in the weeks after.

I started using reddit a bit more, and finally managed to post something there without it being taken down (actually on second try, the first did get taken down because I didn't disclose that the "pre-order discounts" was on a game I made, which obviously makes a big difference../sarcasm).

The two or so weeks before the launch I already had various mobile sites mailing me for some promocodes, which is the up-side of being "known" in a market. In contrast to that there is the PC scene, where I'm basically unknown and nobody talks about my games.

The launch week I started looking at youtube streamers for the PC version, so I basically searched for big youtubers that covered games like: Spelunky, Meat boy, and a few other more recent pixel-art indie games that fit the same category as Meganoid.
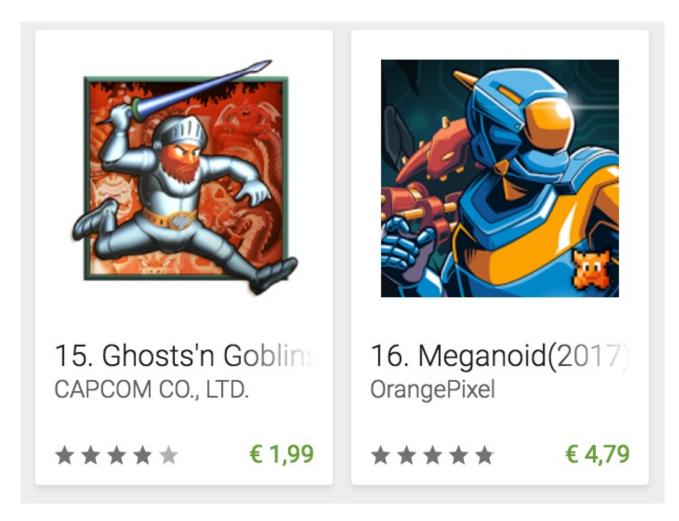
I mailed all of them, close to a 100, which at least one steam-key included (for some group-youtubers I included up to 5 keys) and this all resulted in an awesome 0 streams. I did a follow up email to a large portion of them a week later, and this resulted in 1 Streamer playing it, yay results!

It's still possible some streamers will pick up the game later, having full inboxes, managers that handle emails slowly, or just large backlogs of video's. But I don't hold my breath for any of it. Same goes for PC game-site reviews, so even tho I did everything "right" it basically ended up with fairly little returns on it. The emails were short, to the point, showed a GIF of the game, bullet points, youtube trailer, quick-links and a steam-key included with a link to the website/presskit for more info. All according to the average marketing-advise.

Basically, in my opinion and experience, you need to know people to get things done. But reaching out never hurts and is also the way to get to know more people, so yeah.

Tell about the moneys!

Okay, okay! that's what you guys came for, I get it!

Google Play's "Best new seller" list charting

Let me first start with this, Meganoid was so far:

- Featured on App-store under "New games we loved" - worldwide
- Featured on Google Play "Early Access"
- Featured on Google Play "New and Updated"
- Top-charted (top 25) in Google Play "Best new sellers" list
- Game of the Week - on TouchArcade
- "Best games of the week for iOS and Android" - Pocketgamer

Now, back to reality, for those who don't know, making money on games is HARD, on any given day there are 100-500 games released on various platforms. That's EVERY DAY! Standing out from those games is extremely hard, most games you will never see and they get like 5-10 downloads (depending on how many friends the developer has).

With my experience of doing this business for a long time, I set a fairly low but do-able goal for Meganoid: $6500 during the launch-period. I know it's a not a huge game, and it had fairly short marketing-visibility before release due to the fast development cycle.

For me a launch-period is the first month or so after releasing it. My goals is usually to make 80%-100% of the development costs back in this first period. I calculate development costs fairly rough by multiplying each development-month with $2000 and then add any outsourced

work costs. Since I do code+design+game graphics that often leaves out-source costs to music and high-res marketing art.

The $2000 is very low-end of what my cost-of-living is each month (in the Netherlands, with mortgage, girlfriend and pets). It doesn't take into account taxes and extra cash-flow for "the future". But we're talking about launch-period here, so a game will live on for a few more years and with future sales and discounts you can often double the money a game made on launch.

So for this game I had 2 months of work, that's $4000 and since there was such a short dev-cycle and I used ambient sounds from my sound-libraries, there was no music cost and just a few hundred dollars for the awesome marketing art. So let's round it to $4500.

Now the point is to get extra cashflow to cover the longer development-cycle of Ashworld and we get to a $6500 minimum revenue that I was aiming for with Meganoid. Again this is all launch-period revenue, because obviously it's a low amount especially if Ashworld development still needs 2 or 3 months time. So I'll get to that in a few paragraphs below.
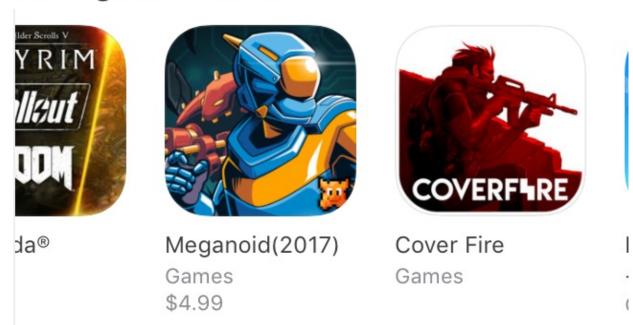
I released Meganoid on March 30 on iOS, Android and PC (steam/humble/itch, windows/osx/linux) and we're now at three weeks into the release and currently the revenue is just a little shy of the target at $6200. Which is not bad at all!

Where does it come from?

So let's dig into this $6200 launch-period amount. Where did most of it come from, and why! The biggest bulk of this comes from the iOS version, actually close to 50% of it: $3580. On iOS the game was priced $4.99 with a launch-discount the first week making the game $3.99. Meganoid was made Game of the week at Toucharcade which most certainly helped, one of the weeks best games for iOS and Android on Pocketgamer, but sadly it had no "games we play" feature for the first weekend.

==For some reason the game only showed up in the "Games we play" on Monday/Tuesday for the USA App-store, at which point it spiked to slightly below the launch spike so effectively doubling the sales in the 3/4 days it had that front page feature. I'm pretty sure it would have done better if it did have that feature in the first-weekend (during the sale) but those things are pretty much out of my control and I'm glad it eventually did get a feature after-all (something I kind had planned for in setting my revenue targets).==

New games we love

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Meganoid(2017)
Games
$4.99

Cover Fire
Games

Apple loved it - all over the world!

Second biggest seller was Android, now this was done a little different. I tried some beta stages on Android and this put my game into "Early Access" on Google Play a week before the launch at a $2.99 price. This price was mostly because I believe that the brave people who try out a beta shouldn't pay full price. The game got a nice Google feature in their "Early Access" list, which only has about 20 games listed, so that's a pretty good list to be in.

==The possible down-side of this is that a lot of people don't seem to be clear of understanding what "Early access" means on Google Play, so there was a lot more buying going on than I had planned for, and that means I was pushing updates daily to work out some "obviously-beta" features. Early-access users can't leave reviews during that phase, so that might have been a positive thing, the down-side of that is that many people forget to leave a review once the game was released.. so not as many reviews as I normally have during the launch-period. Not sure if I would do that again on Android, but it's been an interesting experiment.==

Finally we come to the PC revenue, in total that's $900 which is split over Steam, Itch and Humble. This is also my biggest pain-in-the-butt, obviously my games still don't make much waves amongst PC gamers. Especially since about 50% of that money comes through Itch.io where I ran a pre-order with 20% discount in the two weeks leading up to the launch. So these buyers are mostly people from my own social-circles and mailing-lists, people who in many cases also buy the mobile version and in a lot of cases people who tipped up to $10 (even tho the pre-order price was $3.99!) (THANKS!).

The humble-store sales were about 10% of that, so the rest is up to you to calculate :p

Side note: Besides this launch-period revenue, there is also the added advantage of extra

money made on back-log sales. New gamers that see Meganoid will check out my other games and in some cases end up buying a few more of my games. On top of that a lot of subscriptions to my social-circles and mailing list have happened during and after the development of Meganoid, which are all potentially future fans of my next games.

The ratings!

Another important thing to read about, how are the ratings? Because let's face it, making a game in two months isn't interesting if it's a crappy game. On iOS the game has a strong **4/5 star** rating from gamers, and on Android it's at **4.8/5 star** rating. I'd say those are pretty good ratings (most of my games are around the 4.0 - 4.5 ratings)

On Steam there are only about 4 ratings of which only 2 ratings count since they bought the game on Steam and not through my website/Itch.io or Humble. But I think "all of them" are fairly positive!

Game-site wise, well that's a mixed bag of thingies. As mentioned before, the game was made "game of the week" on Toucharcade, and it was part of the "best games for iOS and Android" that week on Pocketgamer. On the other side Toucharcade's review gave it just a 3.5/5 rating, and Pocketgamer managed to give it a 7/10. So that's the same two websites already making for mixed-reviews. Not sure what to think about it, and it's mostly the reason I focus on the average user-rating on app-stores since those people play the game even after a review.

PC game sites pretty much ignored the game completely, except for a few news-posts on one or two sites. But the whole game-review-site business is something for another topic. In short, those sites only talk about your game if people are already talking about your game, or if there's something controversial to be found, because that brings in readers and thus advertising-money.

Maybe this or that?

Now there's always a part in a post mortem where people go say things that went right or wrong and how things could have gone different. BUT! Meganoid was just as much an experiment as it was a way to earn some extra cash.

For one, the price: $4.99. For a PC game that's a fairly cheap price-point, and it was something I wanted to try out. Normally my newly released PC games go between $7-$10 in the launch period because I honestly think that's what my games are worth for the amount of playtime and enjoyment you get. However, a game like Meganoid is perfect to try out new stuff and I've been wondering if maybe my games would sell better at $4.99. Haven't really compared it yet with my previous games, but my gut-feeling says I sell about as much copies at this price as I do at a more normal price of $7.99.

On mobile the $4.99 is actually on the high-end of things! More experimenting, normally I'm at max at $3.99 and often in the launch week it's at $2.99. I do believe this game could have

done better at a $3.99 or $2.99. Possibly sold much more copies with the result being more revenue. Some people hinted I should have lowered the price when I got the iOS feature, but my golden rule is to not punish the instant-buying fans, which I would have done had I suddenly lowered the price within a week of it's release.

In general the gamers liked the game, which is the most important thing. One guy complained that he couldn't get past the first level so it was way to hard, another guy complained that the sound-effects sounded generic (he was a sound-designer offering to do sound effects.. that's business!). One mobile-game reviewer had a lot of problems with the touch-controls, which is ironic for a mobile-game reviewer in my opinion.

So, what's next?

I've been pushing regular updates to Meganoid since the release, and I still have one bigger update planned. After that it will mostly complete the work on this game minus any required fixes or OS-updates.

I never create games as a service, all my games receive two or three bigger updates and then I move on. That's my business-model and that's how I stay in business.

As for the game itself, it now becomes a "back-log game". This means I'll be able to do sales and discounts with the game in the next few years. It's also possible to perhaps get it ported and released on consoles or other gadgets, and there are alternate sales-routes the game can take on platforms like Android or PC (different markets, bundles, etc).

On top of that the game engine is fairly straight-forward and easy to repurpose. So it could be possible to re-use the game, create a new game-world and content for it and release like a $1.99 game with it (in fact I already have a funny viking-style game running on the same engine, so who knows).

All those back-log options should be able to at-least double the game's revenue within a year, so let's say the game does $10.000 in total by March 2018. Set against the 2 month development cycle (and 13 years experience!) that's not a bad deal.

For now I got some breathing room again for working on Ashworld, so follow me on Twitter or Facebook if you want to stay updated on that one!

(Grab Meganoid here for Windows,MacOS, Linux, iOS or Android)

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