Google

MAG Interactive builds and scales a thriving app business with Google

At A Glance:

About MAG Interactive:
- www.maginteractive.se
- Developer of multiplayer casual games for iOS and Android
- Headquartered in Stockholm, Sweden

Goals:
- Build an engaging and competitive multiplayer game
- Grow a significant user base across multiple countries
- Monetise game to enable users to play for free
- Drive sales of paid version among engaged fans

Solution:
- Build Ruzzle for both Android and iOS
- Scale backend with Google App Engine
- Use Google AdMob for worldwide monetisation
- Sell premium Android version through Google Play

Results:
- Grew user base to over 5M
- Experienced "no scalability issues at all" with App Engine
- Filled all ad spaces to provide a solid revenue stream
- Reached top five ranking in multiple countries since launch

Overview
After building several mobile applications for third parties, in 2012 Swedish developers MAG Interactive decided they wanted to take part in the exciting world of app development on their own terms. Drawing on the popularity of word puzzles in Europe, they set out to create an accessible social word game, and the result of their efforts was Ruzzle.

Challenge
MAG Interactive encountered several challenges around both app development and monetisation. First, the team wanted to maximise appeal and make sure the game could be enjoyed by as broad of an audience as possible. Second, they realised that scalability of the social backend would be core to the game's success. Finally, they needed a monetisation strategy that would not only enable as many people as possible to play for free, but also would encourage more engaged users to acquire a paid-for version.

Approach
The team elected to use an integrated Google solution to tackle these requirements head-on. A mobile-specific game, Ruzzle was built with a spine of Google products. To achieve the broadest possible user base, MAG developed for Android as well as iOS devices. To ensure scalability of the social backend, MAG chose to build on Google App Engine. And to address the project's monetisation needs, the AdMob network was a core component from launch.

Don't just build a game. Build a mobile game. The concept for Ruzzle is based on a classic word game. However, it needed some changes to work on mobile. Short game sessions suit mobile players, who are often taking advantage of small windows in their day. By introducing multiple rounds and a time limit for each round, Ruzzle could be faster paced and more competitive. MAG tested on friends and family "until they were all hooked" – and then watched the rest of the world join them.

Build cross-platform to reach as many users as possible. Ruzzle launched on iOS initially to great success, hitting 1M downloads within the first three weeks. However, there was clearly another opportunity to pursue. "Our Facebook page was full of comments from Android users wanting to play with their friends," says Daniel Hasselberg, who heads mobile development at MAG. "It quickly became clear that we just had to be on Google Play."

In fact, Ruzzle launched the paid version first on Google Play, selling over 60,000 copies in the first few weeks. The free version followed soon after and currently MAG are adding users at the same rate on both platforms, effectively doubling their user growth rate.

Plan for expansion by scaling with Google App Engine. Having owned and operated servers for previous products, MAG wanted to avoid doing so for Ruzzle. "We were going to launch a game with no server, as it's a headache, but when it became clear Ruzzle needed it we immediately

About AdMob

In May 2010 Google acquired AdMob, a leading mobile advertising network that serves billions of mobile banner and text ads a month across a wide range of leading mobile websites and applications. AdMob helps advertisers connect with a relevant audience of consumers on mobile devices and gives publishers the ability to effectively monetise their mobile traffic.

For more information visit
www.admob.com

About Google App Engine

Google App Engine enables businesses to build and host web apps on the same systems that power Google applications. It offers fast development and deployment, effortless scalability and simple administration, with no need to worry about hardware, patches or backups.

For more information visit
www.google.com/enterprise/appengine

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—Roger Skagerwall, CEO, MAG Interactive

decided to move to the cloud," says Daniel. "This was our first project on the platform, but App Engine was an easy choice. We needed a platform which could handle anything, and we saw how well it had worked at scale elsewhere. We were up and running in a few days."

Ruzzle saw rapid growth at launch, and is currently handling over 10M rounds of gameplay a day. Getting to this level and managing it at scale was not a problem. "We saw no scalability issues at all. We are very pleased with App Engine and will definitely use it for our next games."

Drive monetisation with a combination of ad revenue and premium features. MAG were not sure about ad performance before they launched Ruzzle, but wanted to use advertising in their free versions to test this as a monetisation channel. AdMob was implemented from the start. "We knew AdMob would meet any demand and be easy to implement," Daniel explains. "It was straightforward to set up and, even when we were growing at our peak, fill rate never dropped below 98%."

MAG remains pleased with the overall level of monetisation. "We weren't sure you could make money from ads. We thought they might cover serving costs, but it's much better than that. Advertising is a good business in itself, not just a way to support a free version."

The premium version of Ruzzle is also a success. Purchasing the paid version unlocks several high-end features, including ad removal, unlimited simultaneous games, practice mode and full account statistics. Keeping these features, which generate real value for users, as part of the premium version has worked well, with paid users exceeding 10% of the total user base.

"We've been thrilled to see Ruzzle grow this fast across all of the Google platforms MAG have chosen," says Ross Brockman, from Google's Partner Business Solutions team. "Ruzzle is a great game and we're proud to be helping them grow their business through 2012 and beyond." At MAG, CEO Roger Skagerwall is similarly enthusiastic about the project's success. "Our rapid growth to 5M Ruzzle players in less than six months required a highly scalable server solution. Google App Engine transformed this huge challenge into a picnic."