Talking Point Notes

3 innovative examples

1. **The Z Store**: Did not have historical data or access to the knowledge of the relative value of in game items. Released new hard and soft currencies to address our own lack of knowledge and to do a soft reset of some of the economic inflation we had been fighting against as a team.
2. **Empire Z Campaigns**: In Empire Z (like all 4x games) we have ongoing events that players participate in. Historically we would run the same events all the time. When the team was downsized we faced a real issue with how to extend content to continue to feed the beast with limited resources. I had the idea of a “Campaign” of events. This was cohesive new content that was similar thematically. Our first campaign was rolling out the concept of “The apocalypse leaders” where we modeled new infected leaders off the 4 Horseman of the Apocalypse. It represented a real shift in the games theme as well. Previously the group running live ops on the project didn’t take the game seriously in the same way that our players did. There was a lot of what I like to call “Forced Whimsy” in this otherwise serious apocalyptic game through our sales art and premium content. By spending time as a player myself and talking to some our VIPs, under the guise of a re-engaging player, I was given the impression that people didn’t appreciate the silly artwork that did not fit the game’s theme. By shifting the game back into a more serious tone I believe the players really appreciated feeling like something that they took seriously was taken serious by the team. We are currently working on a much more cohesive implementation of the Campaign system which will allow us to roll out new campaigns without as much technical or content support.
3. **Data Driven Decision Making**: This hardly feels innovative but it is something I’ve had to spend a lot of time, effort and emotional energy on convincing people who run studios the importance of collecting and utilizing data as a key part of the decision-making process. I first started seriously considering how to better utilize data about 5 years ago and between Z2 and Ember it has felt like a real uphill battle. We just finished implementing a unified fact table (there is a great AWS talk about it related to a Star Wars game) where I did the bulk of the leg work for creating the data model we would use and have started guiding our data analyst on the key questions we need answered utilizing this model. At this point in my career taking data collection seriously is something I’m passionate about and would be an integral part of any new project that I would work on.

3 Innovative ideas

1. I’ve been doing personal research into game related use cases for Generative Adversarial Neural Networks. The idea is that you can create high quality images based off some unspecific inputs. I think the ability to utilize this new technology for a crafting system would be the kind of unique gameplay element that would stand out in the app store as well as having tech worthy of being published and peer reviewed.
2. Design Home and Covet showed a real competent and tight gameplay loop for allowing people to show off the way in which they want to customize the world around them. Even though mobile gamers flock to familiarity I believe there is a real chance to monetize off people’s desire for individuality as well that is being underutilized in the mobile game industry. This would include more unique customization for players when they want to show off their progress, more ways to be creative with a number of unique items and the concept of voting on who has the most interesting personalized items in a variety of game types.
3. At the core of many mobile games there is a strong social element. In Empire Z the vast majority of sales came from players who were in alliances and we’ve started working more exclusively on alliance facing features to reinforce player participations in alliances. I think the majority of alliance systems are far too shallow and playing up the social concepts that get people hooked on things like Facebook, Twitter and snapchat need to be integrated into future in game alliance systems. This includes Liking people’s progress in game, commenting on items that players want to share in their alliance chat and a general sense that as a player you should be sharing more things with your alliance members. Keeping these communities robust, thriving and together will improve Day 7, Day 30 and Day 90 retention and give newer players a community to feel like they are a part of.

2 Upcoming trends

* Trend 1: importance of machine learning in the coming years. It is no accident that Amazon, Google, Apple and Microsoft have all had major announcements recently related to Machine Learning. Utilizing new methods quickly and efficiently will be extremely important in getting a leg up on the competition in the future.
* There is a proven top 10 game currently out in the world that uses real time PVP as the core gameplay, Clash Royale. Companies need to ask themselves how to take advantage of the ability to do real time PVP and what game modes aren’t represented in that space which can be brought to mobile.
* Continuous combat idle RPGs have some real room for growth with the advancements in monetization from advertising that I think are being underutilized. There is an example game that is made poorly but is still looking to be profitable in this coming year called Endless Frontier which I believe is a great example. A similar style game could have the capabilities of being a lot more profitable. None of the games I’ve played in the genre have felt polished or presented in a good manner and the gameplay is easily expanded into many different genres.

3 Questions related to the creative director’s role

* What kind of role do you have in IP selection for new titles, how interested are you with working on original IPs vs. utilizing the benefits of an existing IP?
* How much work do you put into the UI/UX of specific projects now that you are in a creative director role, how do you assess when a menu or set of menus needs a redesign?
* Do you ever believe it is appropriate to have an aesthetic call overrule data? Do you have an example of when that happened? What was the outcome?