POWERPOINT WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

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WOW MOMENTS

A fetching slide from our presentation

In the last entry I covered our overall strategy and how we started to get ready for pitching the game to publishers, I talked mostly about the game demo. But there is more to a pitch than just a playable demo, it includes various documents, screenshots, artworks and most importantly a PowerPoint presentation that summarizes everything in a nice and accessible way and which may be the most important thing of all. We are going to discuss the video next time, today, I am going to submit for your reading pleasure an essay on working the PowerPoint. It's gonna be exciting!

If you want to be successful, you have to know how to sell yourself. You know the drill: Elevator pitch, describe your project in one sentence, what are the most important features of your game… If you want your game to see the light of day eventually, you have to have all the answers at the ready. For some games, based on one or two central ideas, this can be done more-or-less easily, but it's a daunting task for an RPG where the combination of everything that goes in is more important than any single part.

The easy answer is, of course, saying: "Our game is Like XXX, but better…" Even allowing that it's true, it's still a pretty pathetic thing to say. Or you can try to get your point across as you would to your buddies over a pint, but this is very risky – is the person across the table going to be on the same wavelength as your buddy? What are his tastes? Is he going to be more impressed by passion, trendy superficial slogans, or by sales statistics of similar games?

That was my biggest worry in the month leading to our trip and it made my head hurt. To think that you can ruin months of effort of many people by one ill-chosen word, misjudging your partners and their preferences, that's awful.

The biggest problem I saw in our pitch was the very fact we are making an RPG and a realistic one to boot. For some reasons publishers do not like RPGs and try to avoid them, even though when one is published, it usually sells well enough if half decent. For this reason I put some slides at the beginning of our presentation with the aim to persuade the publishers it would be a mistake to look down on our "adult" RPG. Creating these slides was pretty hard though. Eventually they included half a dozen pictures, including e.g. 1960's Batman and today's Batman, or Red Sonja dueling Arnie and a poster for Game of Thrones. They were to communicate a clear message: our game is Game of Thrones, while other RPGs are Red Sonjas! Surely, there are fans who like Sonja, but most people will understand what I'm trying to tell them.

I went through a sort of first round of pitching at last year's Gamescom when sharing info about our game with some people. The first of them, even before I started, told me: "If it's not a Skyrim killer, there's no point in showing it…" That felt good even though I was a bit surprised: it appears as if a few million units sold changes RPG genre's perception among publishers and it's going to be easier. It was. But was my defense of the genre useless? It depends. When pitching our prototype for real, I made this bit shorter, but didn't remove it completely.

And another one

A PUZZLE

I still had to create the rest of the presentation, showcasing our project and making totally clear what kind of game it's going to be, why it's going to rock, what sets it apart from other games that rock and what's special about it. It's important not to be too self-serving, don't drown the audience in detail and don't make them think you are making a niche wacky oddity for nerds.

Creating the presentation took me several weeks and it was real hell. You spend the whole day discussing the wording of your pitch with a bunch of people, some of them on the other side of globe. Is it better to describe the controls as 'intuitive', 'innovative' or 'revolutionary'? As you try to divine what's going to go best with your audience, you feel your mind slipping away. And believe me, it matters. When I started, my idea was: "Nobody's going to praise you if you don't praise yourself." In the PR business, things are always made bigger than they really are, so I made them bigger too. Then we went through every word of it three times with several people and finally one of them challenged me: "What's revolutionary about these controls?" And so I quickly changed 'revolutionary' to 'innovative'. It should be noted though, that I really do believe that our controls are revolutionary in a way.

And it goes on like this with the whole thing. There must not be too much text so as not to be boring and to fit in the time windows, but neither too short, so as not to appear composed solely of slogans and clichés. You also have to think about the visual side. You like the result, but somebody tells you that the managers don't care for fancy graphics and you should use Arial font to make it easy to read. Then somebody else tells you that it's good to read but looks awful.

It's up to you if you believe in your intuition and judgment or yield to other, possibly misleading, opinions. Often you suspect that a compromise between two opposing concepts will combine the weak aspects of both and that it would be better to have one of them executed properly than trying to reconcile them. After some time, tiredness and resignation sets in: "It's going to be like this, or I'll go crazy and it's not going to look better if I keep fiddling with it!"

This is exactly what I did in the end. This moment came the evening before our departure and it was not the end. We had modified the presentation several time based on feedback from our audience. We changed the order of the slides, deleted duplicate information and even created new slides with a bunch of text about stuff people kept asking us about (and it would never occur to us somebody could be interested in that). How our tour turned out, that's a story for another time, though.

Beside the presentation you are going to need some nice printed leaflets, screenshots and video and everything neatly packaged on an elegant USB drive. You need to make clear what you're going to show and what's going to be left behind. Are you going to run the video first and then PowerPoint, or do you just show the game and leave the video on the USB drive? Are you going to let them play or even leave the playable version behind? Or are you going to play and politely refuse if they ask you to have a go?

I prepared the leaflet, the USB drive looked splendid, I captured the screenshots and we desperately waited for the video to be recorded. This had to be done last, because the video is captured form the final build and the build is always final just as your plane is about to take off. But let's talk about that next time.

Dan Vavra, Creative Director

PS: If you like what we are doing, share this blog and note that we are hiring.

Join the discussion…

kom · 4 months ago
don't sell yourself short, your game isn't even game of thrones, it's better than that. just from the design notes and footage, it already looks better than most complete projects. the crucial ingredient? a world and characters that don't look like crap dreamed up by 5 year olds. i mean just look at dragon age. all that grimdark brown filter doesn't hide the fact that the person who designed the characters clearly doesn't know how medieval armors looked or functioned.
4 | Reply · Share ›

Aris · 4 months ago
My only fear is when I see a game praised with fancy words and after buying it I find it overated and generally a prank. You should certainly maintain a balance between "revolutionary" ,"innovative" and the real thing you develop. I believe that nowadays people who fund games are not looking for a mediocre one-piece thing that will raise slightly their profits. Instead they are looking for franchises that start with potential ,just a Assassin's Creed, and continue with immense success. Every respectful gaming company aims to create franchises even with those games which from the first glance seem to be a full story, like Dishonored. Anyway I hope you create that skyrim-killer which in my opinion is not such a hard thing to do. Judging by your new hiring announcements it seems you got the money and support you were looking in order to keep developing your masterpiece!
4 | Reply · Share ›

Jason · 4 months ago
I take it you found publisher who liked your game else you wouldnt be hiring with 8 new positions open. Good luck with your game, i hope new employees improve and expand your game greatly.
3 | Reply · Share ›

impatient guest · 3 months ago
It's time for new blog, Dan!!
2 | Reply · Share ›

kylebarrett · 4 months ago
Pitch it to Sony, they leave games alone for the most part, and are happy to fund. I actually tweeted your website at some of the XDEV guys about 3 months ago.
3 | 1 | Reply · Share ›

> **Paul_cz** → kylebarrett · 4 months ago
> Screw that, nobody wants them to go artificially exclusive. Game needs to be on all 3 platforms, not just one.
> 3 | Reply · Share ›

>> **james** → Paul_cz · 4 months ago
>> why do they "need" to be on all 3? focus on the best platform, which is the pc, so the quality doesn't suffer across the board.
>> 3 | Reply · Share ›

>>> **Paul_cz** → james · 4 months ago
>>> Obviously PC exclusive would be ideal, but it is not practical. Fact is many gamers only have console, and Warhorse need to sell the game to them too.
>>> Of course, ideally, Warhorse would find someone like Valve as publisher, who have vested interest in PC being strongest platform. Then it might be PC only, maybe. But for now, Valve does not publish games, sadly.
>>> 1 | Reply · Share ›

>>>> **Tuco Benedicto** → Paul_cz · 3 months ago
>>>> Amen.
>>>> 2 | Reply · Share ›

>>> **kylebarrett** → Paul_cz · 4 months ago