

The Eighth Annual Game Design Think Tank Project Horseshoe 2013



Group Report: The Next Big Thing

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Executive Summary

Problem space / mission statement: In terms of games, what are the most promising new platforms, technologies, and genres in the near-term future (next five years), and what creative and business opportunities do they afford?

Process: The participants looked at previous generations of technologies and the games that were inspired by them so those patterns could be applied to new generations of technologies. Tech and game categories were mapped out. Then, participants made a deep dive on one near-term topic with low technical risk, and considered some of the categorical areas in more depth.

The questions that drove our conversation:

- What does 2020 look like? What does the consumer want?
- How did the technologies that came to be create the consumers we have now?
- What fell out of previous generations of technology that represent trends?
- What was the driving force behind each last new thing?

Content of this Report

Why is this topic interesting to its participants?

The Last Next Things

The Next Next Things

Hardware / Platforms

Software / Genres

Deep dive: Multi-Tablet Gaming

Dives: Neurogaming, Wearable tech, Robotics, and more

Why is this topic interesting to its participants?

- Lucrative
- Great creative freedom

- Like to be at the edge
- Because it's slow to change direction of the battleship
- Big ideas
- Indie stuff
- Merging player and creator
- "I'm from the future"
- Don't want to be a follower
- Procedural generation of AI and narrative
- Students working with cutting edge hardware
- I want to be a part of the next thing
- Games are going to be an increasingly central role in society

The Last Next Things

Smartphone

- created touch device
- device consolidation
- location data
- connected to others
- ubiquity
- convenience
- data sharing
- location tracking
- third-world trickle down tech

Tablet

- all of the above
- +graphics
- -mobility

Facebook

- method of connecting to others you know, directly and indirectly
- changed privacy standards and expectations – targeted analytics data (mind control/marketing)

Motion-Based Consoles (e.g. Wii, Eye-Toy, Kinect)

- cool factor
- new way of interacting, more intuitive and easier learning curve
- lower fidelity for gameplay (can we make it better?)

Music Peripherals (e.g. Guitar Hero, Rock B and)

- deliver on the fantasy of being a rock star
- full body gaming experience
- social gaming experience in real life
- attractive to "non-gamers,"
- fun to watch

Gamification

- unleashing the power of game systems onto an unsuspecting populace

- Real-Space Gaming (e.g. geocaching)
- got people off the couch, double-down on exploration

MMO RPGs

- crack, completely ruined lives
- Blizzard-Activision
- got the attention of the industry, which isn't easy, especially when the industry is busy watching TV

MOBAs

- harder than hardcore
- strategic genre turned into a reflex genre
- E-Sports

Minecraft

- obsessive play
- self-determination in games
- exploration
- expression
- non-gaminess
- great example of tipping-point popularity

Brain Training Games

- prey on the fears of old people
- got old people buying DS's
- destigmatized games for non-gamer markets
- trained people to come back daily
- taught people that games can have positive health benefits

Networked Mobile Gaming Device (e.g. Nintendo DS)

- They are networked. And mobile. And gaming devices.

Kickstarter

- allowed Indie games to be funded
- pre-development publicity
- crowdsourced funding and even design

The Indie Movement

- Innovation
- small teams
- independence from the tyranny of narrow-minded publishers,
- increased artiness
- developers as rock stars

Digital Distribution

- allowed Indie games
- cut costs
- reduced time to customer
- reduced ability for the Wal-Marts of the world to censor products

Downloadable Content

- allowed episodic content
- allowed extension of games
- extra income stream for games
- more reason to keep playing games for months/years
- learning over time to improve offerings (analytics, etc.)

Episodic Gaming

- See DLC above

The Cloud

- Indies developing server-based games
- rent it without having to develop your own
- reduced costs

The Next Next Things

Hardware / Platforms

- Neurogaming
- Biometric Inputs
- Sensor Fidelity Improvements
- Implanted Devices
- Virtual Reality
- Augmented Reality
- Wearable Tech
- Voice Input
- Super-cheap RFID
- Home 3D Printing
- Cheap Portable (or Wearable) Projectors
- Multi-Tablet Gaming
- Tablet + TV Gaming
- Digital Tables
- Augmented Board Games
- Augmented Reality Games
- Whatever Woz Says (“Small”)
- First Person View cams
- Spectation/E-Sports
- Robotics
- Self-Driving Cars
- Animals as Games (e.g. Catcam)

Software / Genres

- AAA Indie Games (“Triple-I”)
- Problem-Solving Games (e.g. crowd-sourced)
- Games that Pay the Player (“freer than free”)
- Micro-Length Game Sessions
- Passive Gaming
- Increased Personalization to Ensure Loyalty

- Increased Cross-Platform Portability
- Proceduralism
- Personal recommendation (adaptive) of Procedurally Generated content
- Computational creativity
- AI for co-creation in games
- Cloud-Based AI
- TV-linked gaming
- Games as companion to entertainment
- Large-scale group games
- Flash Mob games
- Game-Creation Technologies for Amateurs
- Better game creation tools
- More outsourcing (more stuff/ less cost)
- Photometric gaming – shoot it scan it
- Games for/from the Third World
- India technology push – subsidized tech
- Cultural Trends -> New Opportunities
- Games as Aggregators
- Games for 85 Year Olds (who grew up on games)
- Games for toddlers
- Pre-Natal Games
- Education through games
- Games for Animals
- Games in/as art

Deep dive: Multi-Tablet Gaming

The group did a deep dive on one near-term topic with low technical risk (platforms already exist)

Examples in the market right now: Scrabble, Space Team, Commander Mode for Battlefield, and Coach Glass for sports titles. The latter is used to deepen the single-player experience, but would be even better with a local friend using it to coach you and turn you into more of a team.

Things will improve as tablets get more ubiquitous, as the market saturates. But obstacles remain: people don't usually carry their tablets around, so requires appointment gaming. And different versions of operating systems and tablet specs.

Phones instead of tablets get rid of the appointment-based issue.

Downloading a client to every phone is a barrier, but not a big one... it's generally known how to do that, and doesn't take too long.

Space Team is probably too niche-y a theme. Themes like detective fiction or heist or James Bond would be more mainstream.

Examples of collocated multiplayer gaming: poker, Monopoly, Trivial Pursuit, Pictionary, charades, Just Dance, Rock Band, Heads Up! (Ellen Degeneres' game). Characteristics: casual themes, easy-to-learn.

Pogo... casual games with chat rooms.

What about women, getting together socially anyway, pull out their phones and play slots in parallel while they continue socializing.

Multiplayer card games (gin, bridge, hearts, mahjong, etc.) Can play spontaneously without equipment,

no need to shuffle or keep score. Lifetime scores, achievements. Can also start to layer in minor rules additions that wouldn't be possible in real-world versions; special jokers and the like.

Branding problem: what do you call this genre to players? "Casual Collocated Multiplayer" isn't going to cut it. Party games? Too confusing with Mario-Ware, etc.?

Like Rock Band, need a single player mode: 1) to learn without doing so in front of others 2) to get better at the game if you are very competitive 3) to get more value out of having the game.

EA Sports/Comcast experiment in the Boston area, 300,000 homes, games on your Comcast box + tablet as controller.

Dives: Neurogaming, Wearable tech, Robotics, and more

The team also considered other categorical areas. Some of the areas have been 'hot' but have then suffered backlashes in that technology was too immature. Some of these areas may now have reached a point where they can become the 'next thing'.

Neurogaming. Not there yet. But will be terrifying when it happens. Will enable new styles of games... like having a controller with lots more analogue controls. When you can get to a point where you think something and it happens, that's way better than any controller. Also, really portable. Gamification of meditation. Gamification of medication. Biometric piece, also. Like games that you play as you're falling asleep (or helps you to fall asleep). Look for slices of life where there currently isn't any gaming. Mirjam's students looking at different hardware, analyzing fidelity. Ultra-high feedback for player performance. Coolness and intuitiveness. Limit to things that are unique to neurogaming.

Wearable Tech. Google glass. Smart watches. With you all the time. People in your vicinity don't even know that you're gaming. Social issues may interfere with popularity of this tech. How it looks matters even more than functionality. Memento – wearable camera that takes a photo every 2 minutes. Motion-tracking fabric. Athletic training gear that applies pressure in the right place.

Home 3D Printing. Print out in-game collectibles. Print your avatar. See success of Skylanders. Print out a 3D item with a barcode on it. Print out lego-like objects that can snap together. Turn a series of photos into a 3D-printed object. Customized controllers for each player.

Tablet + TV Gaming. Interaction between broadcast TV and interactive experiences ... fantasy sports, side bets, live voting, etc. Time-shifted viewing plus interactivity.

Robotics. SF-based company, Game of Drones. Paintball guns on drone copters. In people vs. drones, drones won. If drones develop intelligence, we are done for. Real rock'em sock'em robots. Safe simulations ... do something crazy but without danger. Control robots that go where you can't normally go – in a cave, underwater, in the air over Paris. Go online, look for First Person View (FPV) videos. Roomba Frogger.

Proceduralism. Procedural characters that generate way more content than you could ever create by hand. Success of Minecraft driving this. Using computer created AIs to curate computer generated content. Personal Recommendation. Rating procedurally-generated content to tailor it to the player, and also to surface the best levels (or whatever).

Cloud-Based AI. One word: Skynet. Server-side processing. E.g. battle for Helms Deep happening in the background while you battle one orc in the foreground.

Computational Creativity. Must be novel, useful, surprising, impressive/rare. Need human evaluators. Now, combine those techniques with players doing (and we're going to get technical here) stuff. See TED

Talk about self-moving artificial creatures.

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