

# Introduction

- Make games.
- Develop strong mutual relationships.
- Go to conferences with reasons.
- Why build 1.0, when building 1.x is easier?

# Why we use Unreal Engine?

- Easier to stay focused.
- Avoid the trap of development hell.
- Building years of experience.
- A lot of other developers use it and need our help!

# Build mutual relationships

- Epic offered early access to Unreal Engine 2.
- Epic gave me money.
- Epic sent me all around the world.
- Meeting Jay Wilbur.



# Go to conferences

- What are your extrinsic reasons?
- What are your intrinsic reasons?
- PAX Prime 2013.



# Building 1.x

- Get experience by working on your own.
- Know your limitations.
- What are your end goals?

# Conclusion

- Know what you want and do it fast.
- Build and maintain key relationships.
- Attend conferences.
- Build 1.x.

## **Introduction**

Hello, my name is James Tan. I am the co-founder of a game development studio that is called Digital Confectioners.

Before I became a game developer, I was a registered pharmacist with a passion for game development. Roughly five years ago, I embarked on a journey to follow that passion and to reach the dream of becoming a professional game developer. I made four key decisions early on that I still follow to this day.

One, I wanted to make games.

Two, I need to develop strong mutual relationships.

Three, I need to have strong reasons to be at conferences and never for the sake of it.

Four, I should always remember that building 1 point x is going to be faster and more cost effective than trying to build 1 point 0.

## **We use Unreal Engine as our central middle ware because we want to make games, not technology.**

A game development company is not always a company that develops games. I know that must sound a little odd given that it seems very clear that our primary objective is described in what the company is.

However, this is true because game development has many different potential revenue streams. A prime example is Valve Software. They used to make games such as Half Life but have now created a much better revenue stream through a distribution channel called Steam. Steam has over twenty five million users that regularly spends money on games, that it distributes. It is such a powerful revenue stream that Valve Software does not really need to produce any more games!

A common trap for many fledging game development studios is entertaining the idea of doing something that sounds really easy on paper. But, in reality, is a monumental task which continues to grow. And far too often, the key piece of technology that fledging game development studios under take is the game engine.

A game engine is a collection of tools which when used together produces a form of entertainment. It powers the rendering technology. It drives your computer speakers to produce audio. It performs the physics simulation for realistic motion. It has to do a lot of



things in order to provide entertainment to the end user; a paying customer. It is possible to work on this forever and ever, and forget that you're actually supposed to be building a game. At the end of the day, consumers rarely care about how something was created but whether or not they can enjoy what you've created. That's what they're paying for.

Through out high school I was dabbling with an engine developed by a small company. That engine was Unreal Engine One; and that small company was Epic Mega Games. During university I continued to make small games with Unreal Engine Two by Epic Mega Games. During my pharmacist career I was creating games with Unreal Engine 3 by Epic Games who had simplified their name. And these days I am working on some fantastic titles with Unreal Engine 3 and Unreal Engine 4 by the now, world wide Epic Games.

Through out that span of fifteen years I created so many games and prototypes that Digital Confectioners was barely a year old and it had already shipped its first title. By the time it was two years old it had shipped a futher three titles.

This reinforces the central idea that we want to create games, and not deal with the complexities of writing our own technology; and what better way to just ignore that problem by using world leading technology that is already available at our finger tips, which by the way is also available for free, for everyone.

**By developing mutual relationships with Epic Games we were given a lot of advice and help which propelled us into the games industry, rather than having to build our network ourselves.**

Seeking advice and help is important. Through out the time that I have been in contact with Epic Games; they have always been ready to provide me with advice and help when I needed it.

The very first instance of this dates back to when I was still in high school. I was working on a modification for Unreal Tournament which turned it into a military shooter from a sci fi shooter. Epic Mega Games was working on the successor to Unreal Tournament called Unreal Tournament 2003. Mark Rein, the vice president and co founder of Epic Mega Games came onto IRC, which is a instant messaging application, and offered the team I was working with an early opportunity to try out their new technology called Unreal Engine 2. This exposed me to new technology early which was a great advantage.

The second instance that Epic Games helped me, was when I was in university struggling to make ends meet. I was working hard in a competition held by Epic Games called Make Something Unreal Contest. While crunching on code, I received an email from James Golding at Epic Games, telling me that he thought my little project was really cool. This gave me the motivation that I needed to carry on with it and finally submit it to the competition. I won a place in the competition and I was able to make ends meet for that year.

During my first year of contracting with Epic Games, they sent me all around the world to give talks and to meet people. Being able to meet people through Epic Games quickly sent me in the right direction, that I needed to head into, without having to figure it all out by myself, and without having to cold email people randomly.

The first trip was teaching Unreal Engine 3 to the masses at Dubai together with Jay Wilbur. Meeting Jay for me was a big deal. After all, Jay was one of the original founders of iD Software which created the wildly popular Doom. Jay has continued to provide incredibly valuable advice for handling business and how I should approach growing Digital Confectioners.

Now a days I am always trying my best to align the goals of Digital Confectioners quite closely to the goals of Epic Games. Where they move, we do our best to move a long side with them. By doing this, this allows us to develop a mutual relationship with Epic Games since our goals always remains similar to theirs.

**Why having both extrinsic and intrinsic to attend conferences is really balance of business networking vs costs of doing it (a branch of being able to build off other people's network and tying with why we used middle ware).**

Attending conferences is an expensive thing to do, particularly once you have to send multiple people around the world. Thus you have to really come up with good reasons both extrinsically and intrinsically to go to events such as GDC, PAX Prime, PAX East, Games Com, DICE and so forth.

Extrinsic reasons for us, is to meet and greet people on a more personal basis. Even though we have a lot of communication resources such as email, instant messaging, Skype and countless others; it still doesn't beat, actually going there, shaking hands and speaking face to face with people you want to work with. There is still a level of personal interaction that you have to have with people, after all the world of business normally revolves around lunch, dinner or golf.

Intrinsic reasons for us is usually to help promote games that we're currently working on, improving relationships with clients and friends, meeting new potential clients and rewarding the insane amounts of work that we do.

Being able to promote the games that we're working on is hugely rewarding for us, because we often put in a great deal of work into what we do. Interacting with people who are interested in the game gives you a good chance to find out what they like about the game, what they don't like, and you get good feed back on how to create your next product.

Improving relationships and meeting new potential clients is quite self explanatory, but the reason why it is both an extrinsic and intrinsic is because we know that potential clients often want to meet us in person, we want to gain new contracts and we both often want to explore a mutual relationship where everybody wins.

Finally, we work on an insanely tough schedule and it's great being able to see the fruits of our labor in both the games that we are involved with and being able to relax and enjoy the by products of our work. It is a really good feed back loop for us and keeps morale and spirits up.

The last conference that I went to, was PAX Prime and we managed to full fill all of those reasons. We were promoting a game called Rekoil, which is coming out to Steam and Xbox 360. We got to meet a lot of great people who enjoyed the game a lot.

It was great to see our friends again and to have lunch and dinner with them.

We also met some new people, got to see the games that they were working on and to discuss how we could be involved with them.

We also had the opportunity to check out Epic's new office in Seattle which has given us a few ideas on how we could improve our own working environment; hint: a fridge full of beverages seems to be an awesome way to improve productivity. We also had dinner with Epic Games on the last night that we were in town for. It was a great way to catch up with everyone, and to discuss business in a very casual and relaxed environment.

## **How we got into the games industry by making a mod for Unreal Tournament 3 (taking the idea of something that was 1.0 already and adding to it).**

I've found that nobody really takes you seriously in the games industry, if you haven't made a game before. It's the same circular problem with finding a job without experience. How do you get a job with no experience when a job provides you with the experience you need to get the job in the first place. Thus, how do you get into the games industry if you haven't made a game before.

For me, the obvious route was to take an existing game, in this case Unreal Tournament 3 and to make a game with it. Luckily for me, Make Something Unreal Contest was running again. I teamed up with an excellent level designer named Sjoerd and we started working on a game called The Ball. As we submitted to each phase of the competition we were finding that we were winning placements in multiple categories. In the first phase alone, we took home several first place prizes. This gave us the cash injection that we needed, to allow us to take more time off from work to continue working on the game. It also gave us a great feed back loop to confirm that what we were doing was the right thing to do.

There would have been no way for us to see success this early on, without using existing technology to achieve what we wanted out of The Ball. For us to even think about writing our own engine, and then building a game with it ... would have been such an impossible task for us to do; given our very limited resources at the time.

After two to three years of hard work, we finished The Ball and released it on Steam. We had done it. We've finally released a game on the market. Once The Ball came out, my credentials as a game developer improved dramatically, because of that one shipped title.

Without that game, I doubt I'd be in the games industry today.

This lesson has continued to still be very useful. It is often very difficult to start something completely on your own unless you're willing to sacrifice a lot to achieve it. Remember, a lot of internal and external struggles can make this task incredibly difficult as well ... and sometimes you're never too sure if it will actually achieve your end goal.

## **Conclusion**

It has been a really interesting time over the last five years or so. Starting from humble beginnings of modding a game to learn how to make games, modding a game to break into the games industry and now working on games, professionally all while using the same evolving technology; that I've been using for the last 15 years.

To wrap up, here is summarized version of the four points.

Define exactly what you want to do and figure out the fastest way to do. For us it was to make games. And the fastest way to do that was to use Unreal Engine. Doing anything else would have been crazy and would have wasted a lot of time and money.

Develop key relationships that are mutually beneficial. A one sided relationship never works, it has to be two ways; and the only part you need to worry about is what you can do for them. If the relationship is mutual, then they will think about you as well. By adding an additional node to your network, you will find that it expands your network in ways you could not have achieved alone.

Attend as many conferences as you can, but always have strict reasons for going to them. Don't ever feel you have to go to them just because. You need to have valid business reasons to go, and the more that you can justify the expense, the more you will be willing to spend to do it properly. For example, going to GDC is worthless if you don't spend the money to ensure that you will meet the right people, or if you don't send the right people in the first place.

Building 1 point 0 is really, really, really hard. Never under estimate the work it takes to build something from scratch. Building 1 point x is much easier, quicker and allows you to spend the time doing things that improve your bottom line. Don't build 1 point 0 that will then allow you to build your actual 1 point 0.

Thank you.