The Indy Gold Rush Is On

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Tuesday, 14 May 2013
Last Updated Tuesday, 14 May 2013

The Indy Gold Rush Is On   By George Lewis   I enter the the Moscone Center in downtown San Francisco and into Game Developers Conference 2012.   I get my coveted Giga Pass that with get me through all the doors here at the conference except a few privately held bastions of concealment, a badge holder to keep my little credit card size badge in and a black conference tote bag with all the promo hype and CD of the conference proceedings.   I make my way through the sparse crowd; the mass of people will not be here until Wednesday. But I like the space; I still got twenty minutes to kill before the Summit. Always liked that word which sounds like, “I about to climb a mountain”. I grab a hot drink and a set with some other attendees. The dialogue at the table is about the state of the industry:

“It’s a good time to be an Indy game developer. The studio I am working for is really starting to feel the burn of a their brutal production cycle.

 ”All of them are, the budget of the AAA titles are blotted. Too much money going into production, but not enough money coming back from sales.”

 How true, the shrinking margins and dwindling sales of AAA title has forced the big studios producing the console games to cut back on the development of new games and curtail their operations. Due to new platforms and apps, the industry has become a great market for Indies and an awfully one for the big studios that have dominated the one time strong pure console sector. This industrial crunch, has a lot of large publishers are beleaguered by closures and layoffs. It seems that this large game are circling the drain. With the success and growth of the Indy studios, it just seem to be more difficult for the big industry game studios to survive, must less thrive. According to Digi-Capital, the Digital investment bank in its “Global Games Investment Review 2012” predict that online and mobile games will generate 50% of the gaming software revenue ($41 billion).   But I can remember that it was only a few years ago that those at the top of the gaming industry predicted that the Indy developer was going the way of the dodo.   At the Game Developers Conference in 2008 one of keynote address given by Bing Gordon - Executive VP & Chief Creative Officer, Electronic Arts. It is apparent from the beginning of Gordon address; he believed that the days of the Indy developer are long gone. Gordon makes it clear that you need to have large team and a lot of money to produce a game. He focuses his talk on how to make that work.   Having work as an account executive at Ogilvy and Mather, the keynote that Bing Gordon gave focused on the suits and those on the creative side of the business should and can work together or as he called it the “Holy Alliance”.   What I found truly interesting was the use of David Ogilvy life and philosophy as a model for building business, which will stand the test of time. Companies that focus on keeping teamwork at the forefront of development will succeed. Companies that understand that learning is permanent process will succeed. Gordon noted that successful companies value: (1)   Allowing employees to make decisions without being told.   (2)   These companies honor logical analysis and creativity in thought and action and encourages socializing among the people that work for them   (3)   They create an ambiance where creative nonconformist can do valuable work. According to Gordon it is essential that you keep your team working comfortably in concert. A frequent premise in Gordon’s presentation was people: employ the finest; establish a team, and how to get your team to become part of a mutual culture. At the core of you companies strategic planning should be teamwork   In addition to teamwork, research and testing where at the top of Gordon list.   Gordon presented five ideas for research, which incorporated in the development of you game: 1)   Clicks/minute 2)   Time between excitements 3)   Save game data 4)   Beta Wel clicks 5)   Online play statistics. The first 30 seconds, Gordon reminded his audience, had the power to change final satisfaction ratings by 10 percent.   I think what truly impressed me about this presentation was the clear and concise way Gordon presented these ideas to the Business Summit. I can see why he was chosen for the keynote speaker. The use of David Ogilvy’s life and philosophy as a basis for his presentation was brilliant. I have always admired the Ogilvy’s work, and to find his approach to the business/creative process in the keynote speech was a true delight.
    After two days in the 2008 Business Summit I discover that there is little hope for the Indy developer in the higher echelons of the gaming industry.   I think it very interesting that because of their economy of scale, that the Indy developers where in a better position to implement the ideas present by Gordon, than larger studios. Maybe that is one of the reason that the Indy developers are in a better position in the gaming market place than the big publishers. Now they are at the forefront of this industry that seems to many of the largest studios like a gold rush gone bust.